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[A VOICE SHE HAD HEARD OF LATE ONLY IN HER DREAMS, MURMURED, "AT LAST, MY DARLING, AT LAST."]

THE LOST STAR.

CHAPTER XIX.

ARCHIE GRAVES, delighted at meeting once more the girl who had fascinated him so much on Christmas Eve, went on his way recklessly, scarcely heeding the crowds which jostled up against him, so utterly engrossed was he in watching the varying expression on a small, pale face by his side.

His spirits were high, and this afternoon he felt like a boy let loose from school.

Ruby caught the infection of his cheerful mood, and her soft laughter answered readily to his nonsensical sallies.

She was friends once more with Harold Jerningham; Violet was coming in a day or two—and she knew that she was an object of admiration to every man she came across; was anything wanting to her felicity!

"Now let us go down the middle with a grand sweep on the outside edge!" cried Archie eager to show off the inimitable grace of his companion before the eyes of that miniature world.

"There are too many people!" objected Ruby. "We are sure to come to grief!"

"Not a bit of it! Take your courage in both hands, as the French say, and start!"

Slowly, in long-measured curves, in perfect time with each other, and with a grace that attracted every eye, they came down the centre, men and women stumbling out of their way in a hurry lest they should spoil the performance.

"By Jove! she does it splendidly!" muttered Harold, who was watching with critical attention. "I wonder if she would have done it with me? But it is not wise in a crowd like this!"

Not wise, indeed!

A farmer, named Reardon, who had taken more than was good for him, came floundering up the middle of the ice, looking neither to right nor left.

"Keep off!" shouted Graves; but Reardon, confused by seeing a double set of couples in front of him instead of one, sheered off to the wrong side, and in trying to get out of the way, came down like a battering-ram upon Ruby.

There was a tremendous crash, his feet went up in to the air, his head down upon the ice.

Archie staggered, but the farmer caught hold of his coat, and he could neither save Ruby nor himself.

Several others, unable to stop themselves, fell over them in a heap, thrusting their torches into each others' faces, singeing the men's beards or whiskers, and the women's feathers.

Heartily ashamed of himself, Graves struggled manfully to his feet, and strove to extricate Ruby. But when he had pushed away the others by vigorous thrusts with his elbows, she lay so quiet and white that his heart stood still with fright.

Snatching a torch from the hand of a bystander, he held it over her, and peered, with terrified eyes, into her deathly face.

The lace veil had fallen off, and a small stream of blood was flowing from her right temple, under the clustering curls.

A woman catching sight of it screamed, and brought a rush of people, which cracked the ice.

"Stand back!" cried Harold Jerningham,



in an authoritative voice, "or you will all be in the water!"

As he spoke he elbowed his way to the front, and without a word dropped down on one knee by Ruby's side.

"She's dead, and I've killed her!" cried Graves, half beside himself.

"Don't be a fool," said Harold, sternly. "Keep the people back; and take off her skates!"

Graves obeyed, looking remorsefully at the tiny feet which had borne their owner so buoyantly but a few minutes before.

"I haven't got the key!" he said, helplessly.

"Beg pardon, sir," said a stranger with black moustache and whiskers; "them skates of Miss St. Hellers fasten with a spring. Press it, and they will come off. See, like this!" and he put his rough hand on the shining steel, when it dropped off at once.

Harold looked on in surprise; but was too much taken up with fears for Ruby herself, to make any remark when both the skates were off.

He put his strong arms round her, and lifted her like a child.

Her head drooped upon his shoulder, one soft lock of hair touched his neck, and sent a thrill through every nerve in his body.

Bewildered, he shut his eyes for an instant to collect his senses, pressing her to his heart involuntarily at the same time.

The skaters fell back, and made an open pathway to the bank. Captain Marston came up with eager questions, but fell back in awe like the rest of them, afraid of the answer which might come. Harold walked through the midst of them with a stern face.

"Set the lady in a chair, sir," said the same stranger, pressing forward; "and two of us can easily get her up to the house."

"Thank you, I can manage it by myself. Let someone bring her hat and shawl."

"I've got 'em, sir, all safe."

"Oh, Harold! what is it? Is she hurt?" and Lady Clementina darting forward, laid her hand upon his arm.

"Out of the way, dear. Go on in front, and tell my mother."

"Please set me down," said a soft voice close to his ear. "I—I can walk now."

"Are you sure?" Very reluctantly he set his burden down, and drew her hand within his arm.

She passed the other dreamily across her forehead, and drew it back in surprise. "My hair is all wet!"

He took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped her hand quickly, anxious that she should not discover what it was.

"Where's Mr. Graves?" she asked presently, instinct telling her that he felt himself in disgrace.

"Here!" he answered, in such a dejected voice, that she could scarcely believe it was his.

"I hope we shall have another chance before the frost goes."

"Will you ever trust yourself to me again?" his face brightening.

"To-morrow, if you ask me!"

"Not to-morrow," said Harold, decidedly. "You will have to keep quiet after such a blow as you have had on your head."

"How did I lose my hat? It feels so cold without it."

Harold turned. "Who has got Miss St. Hellers' hat?"

"Here it is, sir," said the stranger, stepping forward; but as Ruby, startled by the voice, looked round, he slipped behind Graves, and she could not see him.

The hat was put on, and they walked on almost in silence, which was broken by Mr. Graves saying, abruptly, "Here, you had better give those skates to me!"

"They were given into my charge, sir; so if you will excuse me, I would rather keep them," said the man civilly.

When they reached the house they were met by the Countess, who was standing at the top of the iron staircase, looking out for their

arrival. "And how is she?" she asked, in some anxiety; then catching sight of the blood-stained forehead, she exclaimed, in horror: "My poor child! You are half killed!"

"Oh, no!" and Ruby gave a faint smile. "My head aches, that is all."

Then something seemed to give way about her knees, and she subsided unperceivedly upon the sofa.

Everyone thought she was going to faint; Lady Clementina hurried away to find a bottle of salts; Lady Chester called out: "Send for Mrs. Nicholson!" Harold ran for a glass of water; and Graves, anxious to do something, rang the bell. The stranger, meanwhile, who had followed them unperceived, slipped out of the room, and forgetting to deposit the skates on the hall-table, took care to give a good look round before he disappeared through the great doors into the frosty air.

Ruby's forehead was bathed, the gentlemen banished from the room, and the Countess bade her stay there for the rest of the evening. Mrs. Nicholson saw that she was provided with everything she wanted, and waited on her with motherly tenderness. The children came in on tip-toe, and kissed her again and again; then went out directly according to strict orders, Miss May looking wistfully over her shoulder, as if she would have dearly liked to stay.

Ruby's headache lasted all the next day, so Lady Chester would not allow any lessons to be done, and told her to come down to the breakfast-room, as the sofa there was far more comfortable than the one in the schoolroom. As she lay there, half asleep, she could not help thinking of Lord Alverley and the first night she ever saw him. A blush even now rose to her cheeks as she remembered how he had beguiled her out of a kiss because she thought he was going to die. She could not tell now, any more than at the time, how much was more acting, and how little real weakness.

By the afternoon post she received a letter from her aunt, Lady Augusta Craven, who had arrived in London about a week before, to say that she wanted very much to see her on Thursday, and begging her not to change the day if it was possible to avoid it, as she had so many engagements that it would be almost impossible to find another that was free. Bitterly disappointed at having to put off Violet, she nevertheless thought it her duty to do so, and, with the Countess's permission, sent a line to her aunt to say that she would be with her by half-past eleven, and a telegram to Violet not to come till further notice.

She was handing the telegram to a footman, when Captain Marston, who she thought had left that morning with Harold Jeringham, sauntered into the room on pretence of looking for a book.

Smiling at her look of surprise, he leant against the mantelpiece, and stroked his moustaches with secret amusement.

"You thought you had got me safely out of the way, didn't you? but fortunately Lady Clementina let the cat out of the bag, so I had a letter from my friends this morning to ask me to wait over to-morrow."

"What do you mean?" looking up with supreme indifference.

"I mean that nothing would have tempted me out of the house when I had heard that your sister was coming to it. So you see all your finely-laid plans fall to the ground; and, thank Heaven! I got the news just in time to prevent me from making a fool of myself with Lady Clem."

"You would have proposed to her yesterday if Violet had not been coming to-morrow?" Her headache was becoming maddening under the excitement of her indignation.

"Assuredly I should," with a short laugh; "a man cannot wait for ever."

Her lip curled with cold contempt.

"Then propose to her to-night—Violet is not coming."

"Not coming!" His face fell. He started from his nonchalant attitude, and turned to-

wards her with earnest gravity. "You can't mean it—you couldn't be so cruel!"

"Cruel!" she exclaimed, in scorn. "Who so cruel as yourself, playing with a heart that you have made to love you, as if it were a plaything of wood or stone!"

"I never played with your sister; upon my soul I never did."

"But you would have, to-morrow"—he shook his head—"and you have done so for weeks with the sister of the man you call your special friend."

"With Clem, it is possible; but then she likes it," he said, carelessly.

"And do you think Violet would care for a love which was to be shared with half-a-dozen others?"

"She should have it all and welcome," his face softening at the thought of her sweetness. "I would have gone to her straightforwardly to-morrow, told her that I was not worthy of her, but that I loved her little finger more than any other woman's whole body. Do you think anything would have kept her from me then? You know as well as I do that she would have flown into my arms!"

Conscious of his power, he looked at her with triumph in his eyes.

Ruby shivered. The light faded from his face.

"Is it true, upon your word of honour, that she is not coming, now?"

"Perfectly true; I have just sent off a telegram to stop her."

"And yet you did not know that I was in the house?"

"No; but I knew that I should be out of it, as I have to go up to town to see my aunt."

"It seems as if the place were to be a desert to-morrow," he said, thoughtfully, as an audacious plan sprang to life in his cunning brain. "I won't bother you any longer, as you are looking so seedy; but remember, Ruby, that I shall always have a tender feeling for you, because of your likeness to another."

"Then I wish I could destroy it," she said, coldly, as she closed her eyes, and he walked slowly out of the room. Two minutes later he was hurrying across the grass, looking about him from side to side, as if in search of somebody who was likely to be going in the same direction.

For some time it seemed as if he had the park all to himself, but on getting to the boundary he saw the figure of a boy in front, climbing over a stile. Without any difficulty he overtook him in the high road, for the boy, who was accustomed to carry messages between the Chase and the station, and in the habit of running like a lamp-lighter, now hobbled like an old man, bound hard and fast with the rheumatism.

"Halloa, Tom! Got the goat?" cried Captain Marston, in a cheery voice.

"Chilblains, sir; and terrible bad they be."

"Humph! not the pleasantest things to walk with. Have you far to go?"

"No further than the station, but that's a mile too far," with a grunt of pain.

"If you were only taking a letter or a small parcel I might save you the trouble, as I'm going there myself, but I suppose you have some other business."

"Nowt a bit! 'cept this paper, sir," said the boy eagerly, drawing the telegram out of his pocket.

Captain Marston took it from his hand.

"And this is to be sent off I suppose, at once?"

"Them be my orders, sir. There can be no harm in your taking it!" as his conscience pricked him.

"No, you little fool. Don't you think I may be trusted as well as you?"

The boy touched his hat, grinned an assent, and hobbled off; longing to throw his boots into the ditch as he went, but restrained by a fear of his mother. When he was out of sight, Captain Marston pulled the paper out of its cover, and scanned the long-coveted address with eager eyes. "23, Chatterton-street! Good Heaven! What a hole for such an angel to be

in! Well, if the worst come to the worst, I know where to find her!"

Whilst Ruby was lying asleep on the sofa, unconscious of the clouds that were gathering over her head, a telegram was sent in her name to her sister, bidding her come by the early train on the morrow, and promising that she should be met on the road. When she woke an uneasy feeling possessed her that she had let out too much to Captain Marston; but on thinking it over she could recollect nothing which she would have wished unsaid, so her peace of mind was undisturbed.

CHAPTER XX.

It was a damp cheerless morning, when Ruby came down in her bonnet and jacket with her fur cloak over her arm.

"Let me put it on for you," said Captain Marston, who had come into the hall on purpose to see her off. "You will want everything you can get to keep the cold out to-day."

She thanked him with a pleasant smile, as she allowed him to wrap it round her shoulders, for she could not help feeling some compassion for the bitter disappointment he had suffered that day.

"When you come back I shall be gone," he said, buttoning the apron of the pony carriage over her knees. "Wish me some consolation for your absence."

"Not necessary. You would have done better to secure your consolation yesterday evening."

"Perhaps, I did, who knows?" And with a mischievous smile he waved his hand, as the coachman flicked the ponies with his whip, and they started forward at a rapid trot.

Half-an-hour later, having seen Lady Clementina off in one carriage, the Countess with her two youngest children in another, Captain Marston with an air of innocence that would have betrayed him to anyone who knew his character, lighted a cigar, and sauntered down the road towards the station.

It was not a pleasant morning for a stroll, and he was not the sort of man to bear any inconvenience without grumbling; but, supported by the thought of Violet, he kept his temper pretty well for the first five minutes, and only began to curse the unpropitiousness of insignificant rustic lines when he found that the train was later even than usual, and nearly a quarter of an hour behind time.

At last a puff of white smoke further down the valley showed that it was coming on its way, and his battered heart began to beat with unaccountable speed as he knew that the dark-looking iron serpent was bearing his beloved to his arms.

Afraid of being seen by prying eyes, he got over the stile and waited the other side, scanning the few passers-by—a woman with a basket of eggs, a drover with a bag of wheat, and a lame youth—with eager expectant eyes. "She must have missed the train!" But, no! here she comes. That graceful pose of the small head, the easy grace of the walk, could belong to no one but her or her sister.

She came up to the stile and looked doubtfully along the road, evidently surprised at not seeing any sign of Ruby, whilst he watched her, his eyes devouring her innocent face, his arms twitching with the desire to catch her to his breast.

How pretty she looked, the darling! with that severe little bonnet tied under the dimpled chin, and a serious look in the lovely eyes, which used to soften so wondrously when they met his own!

She hesitated, put one foot upon the lower bar of the stile, another on the upper; and then, before she had an idea of his presence, a man, whom she had not time to recognise in his pot-hat and ulster, sprang out of the bushes and caught her in his arms.

She gave a cry, but the cry was stifled by a scented moustache; and a voice that she had heard of late only in her dreams, murmured ecstatically, "At last, my darling, at last!"

Then, knowing who it was, she trembled from head to foot, and a great joy possessed her, mingled with fear. The trees and palings seemed to whirl round in a dance; and, scarcely conscious of her own actions, she hid her face on his coat.

Captain Marston looked down on the drooping head with an expression of irresistible longing in his passionate eyes. "Raise your face, dearest, I want to see it!" but she only turned it away more shyly, whispering, "Does Ruby know?"

"Did not you get her telegram?"—a little nod. "Then how can you doubt? I told her that nothing could keep me from you, and she had to give in. Let me look at you, darling; I want to see if you are changed." Then he raised her face gently. Scorching blushes were on her cheeks, and tears in her shining eyes.

A feeling of compunction crept over him—hardened man of the world as he was—and even in that hour of triumph the thought passed through his mind, "Better for her if I had left her alone!" but it quickly vanished beneath the power of her beauty. And as she tried to free herself from his embrace, he stooped his head suddenly, and kissed her quivering lips with eager passion, as the thirsty man snatches at a goblet of wine.

She drew back shyly, but left her little hand still clasped in his as a token of affection. Slowly they wended their way through the wood, meeting no one as they went. She was so bewildered by the sudden apparition of her lost lover, that she had room for no one else in her thoughts; and he was careful to absorb her whole attention, not wishing to tell her of her sister's absence till it was too late to go back, except by the same train as he meant to take himself.

After the dull and tedious life in Chatterton-street, it seemed to her, as she walked by her lover's side, amidst surroundings that were utterly strange to her, as if she were in a dream. Soon—too soon—she must wake and find herself once more in the dismal lodging, with a piece of work in her hand, and nothing on earth but the street-cries to enliven the monotony of existence.

Every circumstance of life seemed to place her completely in Captain Marston's power. She was dull, he promised her excitement; she was lonely, and he offered himself as her companion; she was poor to the last degree of poverty, and he swore that if she would only trust herself to him she would want for nothing. In Chatterton-street, with homely Mrs. Capel for her only friend, she pined after a sister's affection as a love-bird deprived of its mate; but if she yielded to Marston's wishes he promised her such content, abiding love as woman had never known before.

Her heart was soft as a piece of clay in the sculptor's hand, and the man who walked by her side knew that he could do with it as he liked.

His own heart seemed to be singing a song of triumph as he gauged his power over her pliable disposition, and found that it knew no limits. He worked on her tenderness till scruples were forgotten in a sort of delirious delight; and conscience was completely deadened by the voice of the charmer in her ears. She had no chance against him, as Ruby had foreseen when she took such precautions to prevent a meeting between the two. He was a daimon in her romantic eyes—a man so far above the average man of the day that she wondered that every one did not admire his wonderful superiority.

"Your father was prejudiced against me," he said, gravely, as he stroked the hand which he still held in his own. "If he had lived, I could easily have convinced him of his injustice. You never doubted me, Violet?"

"Never," she said, enthusiastically. "I knew that you were good, and noble, and true, and I always said so!"

"And Ruby contradicted you. Some day she shall own her mistake."

"I hope she will; but when she has got an

idea into her head it is difficult to knock it out." And she sighed.

"Hush! you must not sigh with me," and he drew her gently to him, as they stood together in the summer-house, where Alverley had sat a few days before, trying hard to flirt with Ruby. "She will be very sorry to have missed you; but, you see, she could not help it, and I am rather glad to have you to myself."

"But isn't she here?" And her eyes opened wide with dismay.

"Didn't I tell you? I suppose I forgot. She had a letter from your aunt, begging her to come and see her to-day, so she was obliged to go off, much against her will."

"Then I ought to go back at once," very ruefully; "I would not face Lady Chester or her daughter for anything."

"Lady Chester and her daughter are away from home. But don't look so distressed; we will go up together by the two o'clock train."

"But is there none before?"

"Not one. Are you tired of me already?"

"Tired!" with a little gasp, more eloquent than a thousand protestations. "I thought you must be. It is horribly cold for you here," as large flakes of snow came slowly through the branches. "Ah! that is the bell for the servant's dinner—they will all be out of the way—we can get into the school-room as easily as possible, and there you shall warm yourself as much as you like."

"But if any one should see me?"

"They would take you for your sister, so that would not matter. Of course you could go into the dining-room and lunch with the Earl, and whosoever else happens to turn up, as you have come down by invitation; but I think it would be infinitely easier for you and me to lunch together somewhere in town, don't you?"

"Infinitely!"

Captain Marston led her to the breakfast-room by the iron staircase, and then up the back stairs to the schoolroom, where, like two children engaged in a game of "hide-and-seek," they sat before the fire, whilst all the rest of the household were unconscious of their presence.

The mystery about their proceedings gave them a double charm in Violet's eyes, and, ignorant of the fatal precipice which lurks behind the fairest flowers, she gathered them with eager hands, careless of whither and to what they were luring her.

The man who sat at her feet knew the danger to a hair's breadth, but he was the last man in the world likely to tell her, for her risk was his joy, and he was counting the minutes till it would be run.

"I suppose I shall see Ruby when I go back," she said, musingly, as she looked at the rows of lesson-books in the shelves, and imagined her sitting at the table, in that high-backed chair, looking over French exercises.

"Not if you are wise. If I were you, I don't think I should care to meet her after what you have been doing to-day."

The colour rose in her cheeks.

"But how could I help it?"

"Did I want you to help it?" caressingly. "She is so very straight-laced and prudish that she would have grudged me every kiss I have stolen since you have been here."

Violet hung her head.

"I ought to have gone back at once."

"How could you without a train? And do you think I should have let you, if you could? Are you sorry that you stayed?" with keen reproach.

She looked at him from under her dark lashes, and he stooped to kiss her hand.

"Listen to me, and I will tell you of my plan. My things have already gone up to town by the train that I am supposed to have caught, so I need not bother about them. When we reach Alverley, you shall get into one carriage and I into another. At the next station I shall join you, and when we get to town, and have satisfied the pangs of hunger, I will take you to the afternoon performance at the Lyceum

and bring you back to Chatterton-street, when your sister has already started for Paddington."

"But I should like to see her."
"Then you cannot love me," he said, sternly.
"I tell you that one word to her would spoil everything. Which will you have, me or your sister?"

The tears rushed into her eyes, her cheeks grew deathly white. "Can't I have both?" with a piteous gasp.

He shook his head. "You must choose between us. Violet, can you hesitate?"

The next moment her bright brown hair was resting on his shoulder, and the sacrifice of her will was complete. Overpowered by the force of his passion, she consented to everything, even to that mockery of a marriage at a registry-office in London, under false names, which was to bind her conscience, and leave him free.

When he gained all he wished for, he looked at his watch and said they must start at once if they meant to catch the two o'clock train. Violet hurried into her gloves, and adjusted her veil, with his help.

"Now," he said, after considering a moment. "I shall go down the back-stairs, but you had better find your way down the front. Turn to the left when you leave this room, and walk along the passage into the gallery. You can't make a mistake."

"Can't we go together?" she said, timidly.

"More prudent to be separate. If you meet anyone, you know, you will be taken for your sister, so it won't matter. I will go first, and wait for you in the shrubbery."

He opened the door cautiously, and walked softly down the passage. Violet waited a minute till the sound of his footsteps had vanished, and then came out upon Anna, who was looking in to replenish the fire. The girl started back in sullen surprise, for she had been told that Miss St. Heliers was spending the day in London. The meeting so confused Violet that she turned to the right instead of to the left, and found herself at the open door of a luxurious bedroom, which art and money had combined to make into a perfect bower of repose.

After one hurried glance of admiration she retraced her steps, passing the schoolroom-maid again as she did so; and, feeling like a burglar on a nefarious errand, stole down the broad staircase across the vast hall, and out by the front door, which, by a lucky chance, was open.

She felt as if she could not breathe freely till the shrubbery was reached, and Captain Marston met her, with outstretched hands,—

"My darling, I thought you were never coming."

CHAPTER XXI.

"My dear Ruby," said Lady Augusta Craven, as she lounged on a sofa in the handsome drawing-room of—Hyde Park Gardens, with a shawl wrapped round her shoulders, and a tiger skin thrown over her feet. "I feel convinced, in spite of everything you say, that I should greatly prefer you to this charming sister of yours. You are twins, I believe, and very much alike, therefore you have the same advantages of person."

Ruby shook her head.

"And from what I hear, all the advantages of character are on your side."

"Indeed, you are mistaken. If you had only let me bring Violet with me, you would have seen what a mistake you make."

"I don't believe it. Listen to me, for contradiction is a thing I never could endure. Send Violet to Lady Chester's in your place, and come and take compassion on me. It won't be a bad home for you; Sir Arthur and I never quarrel, and I will introduce you at once to the best society."

"You are very good," and the life looked fair enough to Ruby's eyes, "but nothing could induce me to let Violet work instead of me."

"Fiddlesticks! Is the girl made of better stuff than you? If it doesn't do her all this

good in the world I shall be very much surprised. Let her try it, at all events, and if she doesn't get on with the Chesters we can send her somewhere else," and Lady Augusta leant back with a satisfied air, as if she had comfortably settled the matter.

Accustomed to the servile obedience of Indian servants, she seemed to expect utter deference to her wishes from relations and friends, and the slightest opposition roused both surprise and anger. Ruby found herself in a position of some difficulty, for she was naturally unwilling to offend her aunt at their first meeting, and yet determined to stand by her sister at all hazards.

After a minute's reflection, she asked whether Lady Augusta had ever come across a Captain Marston at Bombay.

Lady Augusta smiled as at some amusing reminiscence.

"Yes! The veriest rake I ever knew. He isn't a friend of yours, I hope?"

"He was engaged to Violet last year; but my father broke it off."

"I should think he did! If he knew as much as I do, I should think he would have helped him out of the house with as hard a kick as ever he had in his life. But what made him take a fancy to Violet?"

"Everyone does, she is so charming," Lady Augusta looked politely incredulous. "It would never do for her to go to Chester Chase, for he comes there constantly."

"That is an objection, especially if she is sentimental about him still. I daresay he has forgotten her long ago."

"That he hasn't. He begs and implores me to give him her address."

"Don't give it him, my dear."

"Not for the world; but any day he may find her out, and that is one reason why I long to place her in a home where she would be taken care of."

"I am not particularly anxious to play the part of policeman, detective, or keeper to my niece, and I am perfectly satisfied that you are exactly the girl to suit me; but, still, if you like to send her here to be looked at one day next week, I will see if I can put up with her instead."

"Thank you very much!" and Ruby rose to depart, feeling as if her point were already gained; for was there any person in the world who could look upon Violet's sweet face, and ask for anything more?

"Don't run away yet. Your train does not start till five o'clock, and the carriage shall take you to Paddington."

"But I must go round by Chatterton-street, and I could not take your carriage into such a neighbourhood as that."

"My carriage will go wherever I like to send it. Ring the bell, there's a good child, and I'll order it in half-an-hour. I wish you would wait for a cup of tea."

"What would Violet think of me if I came to London without seeing her?" and she smiled as she thought how she had probably taken her place at the window soon after luncheon to see if she were coming. If there was one thing she was sure of on earth it was Violet's affection.

As the imposing carriage and pair drove up to the door of 23, Chatterton-street, and an august footman deigned to rattle the shabby knocker, heads were put out of windows in every direction, and the fortunate mistress of the house went up sky-high in the estimation of her neighbours.

As soon as the door was opened, Ruby ran up-stairs to meet Mrs. Capel on the staircase, who stared at her in evident amazement.

"Mercy on us, Miss Ruby, what has happened?"

"Nothing, only I want to see my sister, and haven't a moment to spare," and, breathless with her run, she took the kindly old woman's hand and shook it heartily.

"Your sister, miss!" with round eyes, full of astonishment. "Why, bless my soul! what's the meaning of it?"

"Come into the sitting-room and let me explain."

Ruby followed her into the room where she had spent such a happy Christmas Day with her sister, and its unexpected emptiness sent a chill to her heart. "Where is she?" she asked, eagerly.

"Gone to see you; at least, as I'm a living woman, I thought she said so."

"There must be some mistake, for I sent her a telegram yesterday afternoon to tell her not to come."

"She had it sure enough; for I was out, and Mary Ann told me how she had brought it in on the tea-tray; but whatever can she be doing so long and so late as this?" knitting her brows together.

"It is not very late, after all. Tell her to write to me directly she comes in, to console me for my disappointment, and give her my love and these violets. They don't look lively, but I think they will revive in water."

"I will put them in at once. Dear, dear! how mad she will be at missing you."

"Not half so mad as I feel at losing her, because, after all, she can't have expected me. I can't understand it, but I mustn't wait, I suppose," stopping still at the top of the stairs, "she never does stay out late when she is by herself?"

"Oh, dear! no, miss; she is quite as particular as you could be yourself in a general way. That's a beautiful carriage at the door; may I be so bold as to ask if it is Lady Augusta's?"

"Yes, my aunt sent me in it to the station. Will you tell my sister that she is to go and see her one day next week? Don't forget." Then with a kindly nod Ruby ran downstairs, stepped into the carriage, said "Paddington" to the footman, and drove off.

Rather uneasy on Violet's account, she kept looking out of the window, in the hope of catching sight of her. Amongst the passers-by there were well-dressed ladies, with frilled petticoats only just above the reach of the mud; shabby, woe-begone sempstresses, struggling with parcels, which were almost as big as themselves; blue-bloused butcher-boys, with their greasy trays over their shoulders; nursery-maids, with the inevitable perambulator, making incursions on the toes of the unwary policemen looking out for a job; pickpockets intent upon their natural means of subsistence; but amongst the stream of old and young, rich and poor, there was no Violet, so the streets might have been empty to the eyes that watched in vain.

A hansom cab followed close upon Lady Augusta's brougham, but whether accidentally or intentionally, Ruby did not care to wonder. When she reached the station the cab drew up at the same time, and a man with his arm in a sling got out.

With a sudden feeling of shyness she walked quickly through the booking-office on to the platform. Steps followed her closely, but she would not look round, and hurried on as if her only object were to look at an advertisement at the end.

"Are you going to invest in some of that stuff?" said a voice which made her heart beat most unconsciously fast. "I believe it is very good."

"What?" her eyes opened with astonishment, for she was perfectly unconscious of the fact that she had taken up her position in front of a peculiarly attractive poster.

"Haven't you dragged me the whole length of the platform to see it?" letting his eyes rest upon her blushing face, in a manner that bewildered her greatly.

"No. I have dragged you nowhere! Are you going down to the Chase?"

"Not just yet, the doctors won't let me. How are you getting on without me?"

"Just the same as when you were there."

"I thought you were one of the few women who tell the truth."

"What would you have me say? Did you ever help me to teach, to walk, to sing, or play,

That is all I have to do, and I need no assistance."

"At least I put as much variety as I could into the monotony of your existence," and his eyes twinkled mischievously under their half-closed lids. "I, enraged, excited, soothed, and frightened."

"Frightened!" she echoed, with an attempt at disdain.

"Yes, I have seen you shake and shiver whilst your proud little head went up, and you would rather have died than lower it. Ruby, there is no use denying it," and he stooped to watch her face, "but whatever it is you feel for me—its name is not indifference."

"Then perhaps it is dislike," and she tried to look as if it were.

"And perhaps it is not."

There was a pause, which soon became to her so annoyingly oppressive that she was obliged to break it.

"Is your arm any better?"

"No. Paget thinks rather badly of it—talks a lot of nonsense about the necessity of keeping it still, and wants me to lead the life of a bed-ridden old man, which I can't, especially as you wouldn't come and see me. If I were really bad, would you conquer your scruples and come?"

"Not unless you were at the last gasp," and she looked away from him across the bewildering maze of iron lines.

In fancy she saw him paler, more fragile, a thousand times than he was now, his head supported by several pillows, and the dew of death gathering on his brow. Would she ever see him like that?

"You thought I was dying once," he said, softly, and every pulse seemed to beat with shame and indignation.

"Lord Alverley, what brought you here this afternoon?"

"A hansom—and you. I went to Hyde Park-gardens; and your aunt, like the good natured woman that she is, told me where to find you."

"Do you know her?" in surprise.

"I do; so that if ever you desert us and live with her, as she tells me she hopes you will, I shall be one of her most constant visitors. After all, it may be more convenient for our friendship than a lengthened stay at the Chase. You mayn't snub me so unmercifully."

"There's the bell," and she started forward.

"No hurry, the guard is a great friend of mine; and so long as he sees me on the platform he is sure to wait. In here?" as she stopped before a second-class carriage. "It is empty, that is one good thing, but you must have a foot-warmer."

He called for one, saw that it was put in, shut the door, leant his arm on the window, and threw a small packet into her lap.

"Don't open it till you get to the Chase!"

"But what is it?"

"Only yourself, as you seem to me. Give me your hand. Oh, Ruby, my darling! that soft white hand," he murmured, *sotto-voce*, as he clasped it close. "I sometimes think it must be my own," he added, with a smile, as she caught it hastily away, "Remember your promise."

"Release me," she begged very earnestly, "it weighs so horribly on my mind."

"Not if I know it. Even if you would rather ask the old gentleman himself to help you, you must send for me!"

He raised his hat as the train moved off, and waved his hand with a mischievous smile.

She leant forward eagerly.

"Mind you take care of your arm."

She could not tell whether he had heard or no; but a sudden fear darted through her heart when she noticed how very pale he was—when the smile, which she had brought there, died away from eyes and lips.

With no one to look after him, was he likely to take care? And if he did not take care, and the surgeon's warnings were well-grounded, what would be the probable consequence?

She shuddered at her own question, and was afraid to think of the answer.

The pony-carriage came to meet her.

The groom drove fast, but as they passed the lamp at the bottom of the station-hill Ruby caught sight of a man lurking in the hedge.

Some instinct made her look over her shoulder, and she saw him, standing in the road, staring, as it seemed, at herself, but as soon as he caught her eye he slunk back into the shadows.

He had dark monstaches and whiskers, that was all she could see; but something about the outline of his face and figure seemed strangely familiar, and all the way to the Chase she puzzled over his possible identity.

She would have been still more bewildered if she had known that it was he who told Mr. Graves that a key was unnecessary for the undoing of her skates.

(To be continued.)

WILFUL, BUT LOVING.

CHAPTER III.

A GIRL, with a tender, sensitive nature, a deep yearning for love and tenderness, for someone to care for her—such was Dora Clifford, the creature Lord St. Clare had denounced as unbearable.

Ever since she could remember, Dora had lived at Pallas House—she could not even recollect her mother's death. Her first memories were of herself, alone in the grim, red-brick house—alone, though surrounded by many companions, for between them and her a great gulf stood. The other children had homes and friends—she had no one.

Miss Mace was not positively unkind to her, but having consented to keep the little waif for a very small sum she made her strictly useful at an age when other pupils thought only of dolls and games in their play-hours. Dora might have been seen darning stockings; her education was not neglected. In that respect she had every advantage Pallas House could offer; and when Lord St. Clare paid his memorable visit she had profited so much by these that, but for her childish appearance and utter want of authority, Miss Mace would have sent away her English governess, and installed Dora in her place.

But, oh! the pent-up longings, the muttered yearnings in the girl's heart as year after year went by! How she craved for a change from the sober, red-brick house! How she wondered what was beyond the little world of Pennington! How she desired, above all else, a little of the love she saw poured out upon her companions!

Many a motherly heart pitied her; many a lady, calling at Pallas House to fetch her own children for the holidays, would gladly have taken Dora home on a visit; but two things prevented this—Miss Mace refused all such offers, and the school-girls themselves never coveted Dora as a companion. To them she was dull, gloomy—the last person they wanted to take home with them.

And so, when Dora entered Miss Mace's drawing-room to meet Lord St. Clare, it was the very first time she had ever been summoned there, and her heart throbbed as though it would burst its bounds.

Was a new life opening for her? Were all the beautiful day-dreams she sometimes gave way to, to become realities?

Alan Dene was essentially a gentleman. Although the girl's appearance gave him a shock, although her very existence blighted his future, he could not have greeted her otherwise than courteously. It was not in his nature to be anything but gentle towards a woman.

He advanced to meet her, and took her hand.

"You did not expect to see me," he said, a little awkwardly. "But, Miss Mace will have told you, I am your cousin—the nearest relation, unfortunately, that you possess!"

She answered nothing.

She was thinking—poor child!—how tall an handsome he was. Surely the knights of olden time, the heroes of the favourite poems, must have moved and looked like him!

"We are strangers," went on Lord St. Clare; "but I hope that will be so no longer. I have asked Miss Mace to send you to stay with us at Castle St. Clare next week."

"To stay all the holidays?" asked Dora, wonderingly.

"To stay as long as you can be happy. By your grandfather's will I am your guardian, Dora."

"But shall I not come back?"

"No; I think not. Are you so fond of Pallas House that you cannot bear to leave it?"

"I am not fond of it at all; but it is the only home I have ever known, and my mother died here."

"Castle St. Clare must be your home now," said the Earl, lightly; "at least, for the present; and my sister, who is staying there, will take good care of you."

"Is she Lady St. Clare?"

He shook his head.

"There has never been a Lady St. Clare since your grandmother's death. If it will reconcile you to coming, Dora, you must know that the castle was your mother's home. She lived there till she married."

It was an unspeakable relief to him that Miss Mace now appeared, thinking the *de-d-d-ble* had lasted long enough.

The earl rose at once.

"I need not trespass on your time longer, madam," he said to the principal. "Mr. Barnes will wait upon you to-morrow, and I am sure I may rely upon your discretion."

Another moment and he was gone. Dora had sunk down upon the sofa, utterly forgetful of everything around her, her face buried in her hands.

"Well!" cried Miss Mace; "it is the strangest thing I ever heard of. Child, why don't you look up? Why don't you say something? Are you stone?"

Slowly the girl uncovered her face.

"Do you think it is not a dream?"

"Dream? Fiddlesticks! It is sober, earnest, and the most wonderful good fortune that could befall you. An earl's granddaughter, and a home at a castle! What more could you expect?"

"Nothing! Not half so much!"

"Then why do you stand there like a statue?"

"There will be no one to love me!" cried the girl, her habitual reserve giving way under the pressure of excitement. "No one to care whether I am happy!"

It was so true, so exactly the case, that Miss Mace never attempted to deny it. She felt a strange thrill of compassion for the orphan.

"My dear, plenty of people will love you if you will let them."

"I am so plain," sobbed Dora. "Oh! Miss Mace, why couldn't I have been pretty? Everyone would have loved me then!"

"Beauty is only skin deep. People will love you fast enough if you are a good girl, and don't take absurd fancies into your head. Go and fetch a paper and pencil now, and we will make a list of all you will want. How I am to get you an outfit suitable for an earl's grandchild in a week I can't tell! But I have promised your cousin to do my best."

The solicitor's visit the next day, the sight of her own legacy and of a cheque for two hundred pounds for Miss Clifford's requirements, so inspired Miss Mace that she worked wonders. She even confided the school to the teachers for one whole day, and went with Dora to Birmingham—a distance of twenty miles. They spent some hours in a ladies' outfitters; and the said outfitter, inspired by the liberal order, promised that everything the young lady needed should be at Pallas House by December 23rd.

When the things came home Dora was almost bewildered. Never had she seen the like. Miss Mace had once been governess in

high family, and so she knew a little of what was proper. Dark cashmere toilettes for mornings; velvet costume for visiting; tasteful evening dresses; hats, jackets, gloves, umbrella, muff, laces, frills, ribbons—nothing had been forgotten.

Dora looked at the array in consternation. "I shall never know which to wear!"

Miss Mace herself superintended her pupil's attire on the morning of the 24th, and when Dora was dressed she decided that certainly fine clothes made a difference in everyone.

A well-fitting dress of navy-blue cashmere, trimmed with velvet; a tight cloth jacket, bordered with fur, and a beaver hat and feathers made Miss Clifford look almost pre-entable.

"But even now no man would ever look at her twice," decided the preceptress. "Oh! why isn't she a little fitter to be a countess! I wonder if he will marry her after all!"

She confided Dora to the care of a staid upper-servant thoroughly used to travelling, and started them off at eleven o'clock, by which arrangement she thought they would reach Castle St. Clare about six.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said, kindly, as she took the girl's hand for the last time, after presenting her with a purse containing the remainder of the solicitor's cheque; "I never thought I should be so sorry to part from you. Take care of yourself, and remember you have always a friend at Pallas House."

Dora felt so hopelessly frightened, so terribly shy of her unknown relations, that she would almost rather have remained in the old red-brick house, and given up her adventurous wishes to see the world.

The superior servant treated her with great respect. News always flies quickly, and the household at Miss Mace's knew that Miss Clifford had suddenly become a very great person. Indeed, Susan, in fact, carried her respect almost too far, for she never attempted to travel with her charge. She placed Dora in a first-class carriage with books, cloaks, and shawls, and she herself modestly took her place in a humble compartment.

They reached London about two, chartered a cab, and drove from Euston to Charing-cross without much difficulty, and, by sheer good fortune, just caught the train for Wilmington, instead of having to wait another hour for the next, as Miss Mace had foretold.

Dora was tired of reading. She threw aside book and papers; and, establishing herself in a corner by the window, tried to imagine what her new home would be like by the scenery through which she was passing. A stranger sitting opposite was amused at her eagerness.

"Some school-girl going home for the holidays," he thought. "What a delicate-looking creature."

He never applied the terms "unbearable" or "ill-bred" to her; but then he was an author—a keen judge of human nature. He could understand the wistful soul shining in those deep, blue eyes; besides, he was not in love with Blanche Delaval, and so he did not institute comparisons between the finished beauty of a woman of the world and the unconscious timidity of a child.

"You look very tired!" he said to her, kindly. "Let me try and make you more comfortable?"

He was about the age of Lord St. Clare, but he had had to make his own way in the world, so that he seemed older than his years.

Dora thought him quite middle-aged, and looked on with grateful acceptance, while he rolled her cloak into a pillow for her head, reserving one large rug to wrap round her slight figure.

"There!" said Herbert Cecil, quietly, "that is better."

"Oh! yes," with a little sigh of relief—"thank you very much, sir. I was so tired."

The "sir" perplexed Dora. Dora being accustomed always to address the professors thus was quite ignorant of the words being

superfluous when talking to ordinary gentle men.

"You have come a long way?"

"Oh! yes; more than a hundred miles, and I have only been in a train once before."

He started—he really could not help it.

"Only once since I can remember," added Dora, correcting herself. "It seems so strange."

He smiled.

"You have the advantage of most of us; travelling must be quite a novelty to you?"

"Yes."

"Are you alone?"

"Oh! no. Miss Mace sent Susan to take care of me."

He wondered a little where Susan was.

"Miss Mace is your governess?"

"Yes; how did you guess that?"

"I don't know. Then you have left school now?"

"Yes!" and her voice was very grave; "I have left school now; but I was there more than fifteen years; so I can hardly realize it."

He laughed.

"You must have begun your education early; and now you are going home."

"Oh! no," said Dora, quickly. "I have no home."

Herbert felt a pang for the girlish creature, who confessed her loneliness so naively.

"I might say the same," he said, kindly; "but the next best thing to having a home is to visit true friends. I am just going to spend Christmas with an old school-fellow (though I have only just left school), and I am looking forward to our meeting very much."

Dora looked down, and said nothing.

Herbert collected together his small properties as the train slackened speed.

"I shall leave you here. This is Wilmington."

"Oh! I ought to get out at Wilmington," said Dora, with all the nervousness of an inexperienced traveller. "Oh! I hope Susan will remember!"

"You need not be afraid, the train waits here five minutes." He folded her rug, handed her and her belongings out with a grave, protecting care, and then, seeing a middle-aged woman approaching, he left Dora to her care, and turned away in search of his friend.

"Alan will not let me arrive unwelcomed," he thought to himself, and sure enough there was the Earl's tall figure approaching; two or three dogs at his heels, and a footman hovering in the rear.

"Welcome!"

The two men shook hands warmly; they were tried and trusted friends, only the fact that Mr. Cecil had but just returned from a foreign tour of some months' duration had prevented Alan from detailing his perplexities to him before. As it was, Herbert knew nothing of his troubles, except that his wedding had been postponed through the late Earl's death.

"Why, what a grave, scholarly person you have grown, Herbert!" said the Earl, lightly. "Don't you think it's a wonderful sagacity on my part to recognise you so promptly? But you are looking wonderfully well, man—Germany agreed with you."

"I can't say the same for you," returned Mr. Cecil, gravely. "Why Alan, you, look as if you had the cares of the world upon your shoulders."

"I have."

"Nonsense—a young nobleman with an unencumbered rent-roll! Now, if you were a struggling author like me?"

"I wish I was!" discontentedly. "Ha! the man has got your traps; come along."

And only when they were driving off in a neat dog-cart did Herbert perceive that his late companion and her maid were still waiting on the platform.

"When am I to officiate as best man?"

The groom and the luggage had followed in a light cart; the two friends were alone.

Alan waited fully five minutes before he answered.

"I don't know; I'm in a peck of trouble, Bertie."

A few words brought out the whole story. Alan declared his intention of giving up his fortune sooner than his bride.

"And Miss Delaval will be content to wait for you?" thinking such contentment accorded very little with the accounts he had heard of the beautiful coquette.

"She is an angel!" said Alan, with a sigh. "Only think, Bertie, she has given me my freedom; refuses to let me sacrifice the estates for her sake; even declares in time I may grow to tolerate my detested cousin!"

The entire disinterestedness of Miss Delaval's conduct did not strike Mr. Cecil.

"Then your engagement is broken off?"

"Not exactly; we are waiting, you see—something might turn up."

"I hardly see what. The case seems clear enough to me, Alan; money or love—you must choose between them."

"I have chosen, if I could but overcome my darling's scruples. You will see them both to-night, Bertie—the girl I love, and the miserable child foisted on me by our uncle's will. When you see the contrast they present you will understand my misery."

"You cannot mean that Miss Delaval is here?"

"Of course she is."

"But I thought your cousin—"

"Do you think I would avoid Blanche for her sake? If Miss Clifford objects to meet my guests she can keep her own rooms."

"But, Alan, never was such a thing heard of. How can you throw those two together? If you mean to marry your cousin surely Miss Delaval's presence is almost an insult to her."

"She will never know."

"Then you will deceive her?"

"She can't be so insane as to fancy that I am in love with her! Why, Bertie, I have only seen her once for five minutes. I went down to the school where she had been shut up for fifteen years, and I only wished Miss Mace could have kept her there for the rest of her life."

The name was a revelation to the author. Then the wistful child who had travelled with him—the girl who had spoken pathetically of her loneliness—was the creature whose existence was such a trial to Lord St. Clare!

Alan was Cecil's friend, but the larger share of his sympathy went out to Dora. He could not understand any man speaking so heartlessly of a creature who had no protector but himself.

Mrs. Fane welcomed her brother's friend very prettily, then she turned to Alan.

"I am getting seriously uneasy! Miss Clifford has not arrived, Alan; I expected her hours ago."

"She'll be here soon; of course you have sent to meet her, Bee?"

"Why Alan, I asked you this morning to order the brougham to be at the station by two o'clock, and wait every train until she came. That is the only way when you don't know the hour a guest is due."

"I'm awfully sorry, Bee! I forgot all about it. But she couldn't have had the brougham in any case, for Blanche drove into town shopping, and has only just returned."

Mrs. Fane looked unexpectantly annoyed, but turned away to busy herself with her cups and saucers.

"Has Alan told you?" she asked Cecil, almost in a whisper, as he came forward to take his tea from her hands.

"Yes."

"Then you will understand how vexed I am. Whether he marries her or not, she is a daughter of the St. Clares. I cannot bear her to feel herself offended!"

"I do not think she will do that, she is too sensitive; hurt she may be, but not offended."

"Why, you speak as if you knew her!"

"I travelled with a young lady from Charing-cross, and, from one or two remarks, I fancy she must have been Miss Clifford."

"Really! I wish she was here! Poor girl, I

dare say she dreads the meeting as much as I do."

"More, I should fancy! Mrs. Fane, it is natural you should be prejudiced against her; but I think you will be sorry for her when you see her. She is nothing but a child, with great frightened, blue eyes."

He looked across to a distant sofa where Blanche Delaval sat at Lord St. Clare's side—a kind of instinct told him she would be cruelly hard upon his little fellow-passenger. In all the castle no one showed much interest in poor Dora; if he could but touch Mrs. Fane's heart it would be something.

"I am very sorry for her," said Bee, quickly, "much as we must regret my uncle's will no one could blame her, poor child, for its contents."

A little stir in the hall, the sound of footsteps, and then, when all was quiet, a servant entered and addressed herself to Mrs. Fane.

"Miss Clifford has arrived, madam."

Beatrice started up.

"Here! where is she?"

"In her own room, madam. I have taken the maid to the housekeeper's room. She intends to leave at once, but we told her you would wish to see her in the morning."

Beatrice bowed approval; then she left the drawing-room and went up the grand staircase to the room apportioned to Miss Clifford.

Could the servants have taken their cue from the Earl's forgetfulness about the brougham, or was it simply an oversight, cold as was the night?

Christmas Eve though it was, no fire burnt in the grate. The wax candles were not even lighted; by the faint glimmer of gas from the corridor Beatrice saw a slight figure crouching in an easy chair, and heard pitiful sobs coming from its childish breast.

However much she might sympathize with her brother, Bee was too tender not to pity Dora. With her own hands she lighted the candles, then she threw her arms round the weeping girl, and knelt down by her side.

"You must not cry like this; you will make yourself quite ill, my dear. Do look up and speak to me."

Fifteen years' passive obedience had left their mark on Dora.

Although she still sobbed on she raised herself to a sitting posture, and tried in vain to grow calmer; then, as she saw the lady's thin, blue dress and fair, uncovered arms, she said, quickly,—

"Do not stay, please, you will be cold."

"I shall stay, certainly," said Mrs. Fane,

"I want to see you more comfortable, and to tell you how sorry I am you were not met; it was a mistake about the carriage."

Dora trembled like an aspen leaf.

"What is the matter?"

"Oh!" cried the girl, clinging to her dress, "please let me go back. Susan is here, she will take me. Oh! you seem kind and gentle. Please let me go!"

"Were you so sorry to leave, Miss Mace?"

"It is not that."

"What is it, dear?"

"No one wants me here," sobbed the girl. "I shall be in your way. Lord St. Clare saw me at the station; his coat-sleeve touched my arm, but he never spoke to me."

"Alan is absurdly stupid at recognizing people."

She unfastened the girl's wraps, and then rang the bell violently. The servant who attended was surprised at the anger in her lady's face.

"Light the fire instantly, and send a maid to unpack Miss Clifford's boxes. Let Pauline bring tea to my dressing-room at once."

Then linking her arm within Dora's she led her to a cosy apartment, which seemed perfectly ablaze with fire and comfort. Here she placed her shy, trembling guest in a low chair, and when the tea came attended to her wants with a thoughtful kindness which went far to win Dora's heart.

"And you are Miss St. Clare?"

Bee shook her head.

"I am Beatrice Fane; I must introduce you to my husband presently, and show you my two pretty little girls. Now, are you quite rested? Then you will like to go back to your own room, and dress for dinner; I shall send Pauline to help you—we must get you a maid of your own in a day or two."

Pauline was devoted to her mistress, and having been directed with a smile to do all she could for Miss Clifford, she waited on the young lady with most respectful attention, never asking a question; but taking the choice of Dora's toilet entirely on herself, a course which was a great relief to the object of her care.

After all, it was a very simple toilet, only a white muslin and pink ribbons, but the whole in perfect taste—no ornaments, no flowers—a dress a child of four might have worn, and yet making Dora look her best—not that that best was much. Beside Blanche Delaval, many would have called her plain. It was only the few like Mr. Cecil, versed in studying faces, who could discern the promise of a glorious womanhood in that slight, quiet girl.

Captain Fane took her into dinner, and his simple kindness soon put her at her ease.

Several guests were present, so that there was no lack of conversation, and, as always happens in a large party, *à la tête* flourished secure from observation.

"Who is that by Lord St. Clare?" demanded Dora, when she found courage to ask a question.

"That is Miss Delaval, a ward of mine."

"She is very beautiful!" with a little sigh, as she watched the eager air with which the Earl bent forward to his companion. "Is she engaged to Lord St. Clare?"

Captain Fane started. Was match-making really inherent in women? It must be, surely, since this girl, fresh from an almost convent life, detected at a glance a love affair; but she had asked a question he had no mind to answer.

"They are very intimate," he said, carelessly. "Blanche is like a younger sister to my wife."

Later on, in the drawing-room, Beatrice introduced the two who were to have such an influence on each other's fate—the woman in the zenith of her beauty, the girl in her timid shyness.

"I am sure we shall be great friends," said Blanche, effusively. "I have heard so much of you, Miss Clifford!"

She sat down beside Dora, and began to make herself agreeable, but she did not stir the girl's heart as Mrs. Fane had done. She drew nothing but short, vague replies from Dora; and at last, tiring of her attempt, and seeing Lord St. Clare appear, she crossed the room to his side.

"I have been conversing with your destiny."

"Hush!" he said, in a pained voice, "don't jest about it, Bianca, *mie*."

"I jest! I who am forsaken—who must wear the willow! The idea!"

"What did you think of her?"

"Think! why, that she is a harmless nonentity! She will not give you any trouble, Alan; let her have a big doll's-house and a few fairy books, and she will be quite happy."

"Poor child!"

"What! you pity her? All your pity belongs to me, Alan!" and she leant her white hand caressingly on his arm. "I can pardon you for marrying her—your race demands that you should be a rich man—but I will never forgive you if you love her—never! until we are both cold and dead."

"Is it likely, loving you, that I should ever change?" he asked, wearily. "Blanche, my darling, forget your scruples; let me fix a day for our wedding, and leave my cousin to enjoy her riches."

The flower-like face bent over him, the clear eyes were raised to his, they looked a dream of tenderness. Alan's hopes ran high, then they faded as Blanche drew her hand away from his ardent clasp, and murmured,—

"No, do not tempt me; it would be no real kindness to you to grant your prayer. Lord St. Clare poor would be a ruined life—and I will not have the ruin of your future at my door, Alan!"

And then she let fall the train of her dinner-dress, and swept across the room to join Mrs. Fane.

CHAPTER IV.

"Will you tell Dora that I wish to speak to her?"

The speaker was Lord St. Clare. The time one bright, cold morning about the middle of January.

Mrs. Fane looked up with a troubled face. Three weeks had passed since she had received her young orphan cousin, and she had grown, almost in spite of herself, to love the girl, who yet stood between Alan and happiness. Things had not gone continually, as on that first night, Blanche Delaval had departed on a long visit; the other visitors had mostly left, and the Earl had had plenty of time to devote himself to Dora.

Bee could not complain that he neglected his destined wife. He took her out to walk or drive most days; he selected books for her from the library; and he even sat beside her on wet afternoons in the drawing-room. But he found it weary work; and his sister, who knew him well, was quite conscious that even had he never seen Blanche Delaval he would yet have not loved Dora Clifford.

"What are you going to tell her, Alan? Do not startle her; remember what a child she is."

He stamped his foot impatiently.

"Do you take me for an ogre, Bee?"

"No; but I want you to be gentle to poor little Dora."

"I have no desire to be otherwise. This absurd farce must be ended soon. I may as well explain our position to her, and ask when she would like to be married."

"You make me doubt of her acceptance!"

"I think she is one of those weakly insane women, who never have a will of their own. She is just the type of a French girl, who marries the first *parti* her parents find for her."

"And you are quite resolved?"

"Perfectly,"—bitterly—"Look there!"

He put a fashionable society paper in her hands, and pointed to the announcement that "A marriage is arranged between Captain Fane's beautiful ward, Miss Delaval, and the most noble the Marquis of Alenton."

"He's eighty if he's a day!" said Alan, shortly; "how can she throw herself away? But there, I see it all; she knew as long as she was free I would not accept my release. Release, indeed! when I have to take on myself a bondage more bitter than death."

Mrs. Fane answered nothing—she could not; she only went out of the room, and sent Dora to her brother, merely saying, that "Alan wanted to speak to her."

No thought of the seriousness of the summons came to Dora. She entered the boudoir with a blithe step. She looked quite a different creature from the weary, dispirited girl who had come to Castle St. Clare three weeks ago. In truth she was very happy. Bee loved her, and made her feel at home. Mr. Cecil talked to her, and the Earl was kind to her. Poor, foolish, little Dora, who looked on Alan as the first of created beings, and was foolish enough to feel as if heaven had suddenly come to her if he only smiled.

"Bee said you wanted me, Lord St. Clare?"

"Bee was quite right."

He closed the door, and came over to the fireplace—standing on the rug in full face of the slight, girlish figure in a low, lounging chair.

The gravity of his face half alarmed Dora—she started up with a cry.

"Is there anything the matter? Oh! Lord St. Clare, have I done anything wrong?"

"You have done nothing wrong. I want to talk to you about your future. How old are you, Dora?"

"I shall be eighteen in May."

"You are too old for school. Dora, do you think you would like to live at Castle St. Clare always?"

A great light came into the girl's face.

"Do you really mean it? Shouldn't I be in the way?"

No! touched in spite of himself by her eagerness. "I mean it. And you would not be in the way, for if you stayed at all it must be as the castle's mistress. Your grandfather loved me as a son; it was his dying wish that you should live here always—a my wife!"

The two hands went up to hide her face. Alan could see she was very much surprised.

"Another girl would have guessed it directly," he thought to himself. "What a child she is! I am waiting for your answer, Dora."

She blushed crimson, the carmine flush mantling face and neck; but she spoke no word, and Alan continued his explanations.

"You and I are the two last of the old line; it was your grandfather's wish that we should be one—that our interests should be the same."

She hesitated; novice as she was in heart histories, she knew there was something lacking in his wooing. She loved him—ah! how dearly. The very thought of spending her life at his side was happiness, and yet she wavered.

"Are you sure?" she whispered; "sure you wish it?"

"My dear!" said Alan, a little irritably, "I have told you that I do. I consider your grandfather's wish binding upon us both. I am not a boy to change my mind; if you will be my wife I will do my best for your comfort and happiness. More I cannot say; you know enough of me to judge if you will accept my offer."

No word of love! Alan left that out of the bargain entirely. He never asked for it or offered it; but poor Dora never reflected what the omission meant. To her the Earl's proposal was a great—an unexpected happiness. She had done her utmost to resist the temptation—tried her best, poor child, to push the cup of joy from her lips. Now need she refuse it longer? She loved him with the affection pent up in her heart during her lonely childhood, and he told her she wanted her—he wished her to be his wife. True, once Dora had thought he loved Blanche Delaval; but everyone had said they were like brother and sister. And Miss Delaval had gone away; Alan was free to choose his wife from the whole world, and if he picked out a little, insignificant creature like Dora, it must be because he loved her! Very gently, and yet so distinctly that every syllable reached him, she said,—

"If you are quite sure you wish it I will—"

"You will consent?" he interrupted her. "Don't tremble so, my dear child, there is nothing terrible about it."

"If only you should be sorry," cried the girl, with a strange impulse of dread; "if only you should not be happy!"

"Don't fret about that," said Alan, almost roughly; "things will be right enough. Run away to Bee now, and tell her you are going to be her little sister. Then suddenly, as though he had forgotten something, he just touched her forehead with his lips—such a careless, indifferent caress—such an evident duty salute; and yet, poor child, it set her pulses throbbing. Yet to her life's end she never forgot that kiss, and the moment of ecstasy it brought her.

She did not obey her future husband by going at once in search of Mrs. Fane, instead she crept away to her own room, and throwing herself into a chair tried to realize the happiness that had come to her—"Alan's wife!"

Never had she dreamed such an honour

would be hers. She had loved him, poor child, blindly, patiently, enduringly; but she had never thought he cared for her; she had ascribed his careless, indifferent kindness to the generosity of his nature.

"He loves me!" she whispered to herself, "he loves me! Oh! what have I done to be so happy? After all those lonely years at Pallas House, to spend my life at his side! It is too much joy, the world is too full of gladness! I have nothing," she thought to herself, just a little regretfully; "he gives me all—home, money, rank. Oh! Alan will my love ever make up to you for all? I have no kingdom to give you, dearest, but my heart; yet that is yours—will be yours only until I die!"

A soft rap at the door, and Mrs. Fane entered.

"Alan has told me everything, Dora," she said, gently, taking the girl into her arms in a pretty, affectionate way, which had something motherly about it in spite of her extreme youth. "My dear, I hope you will be happy!"

"I must be happy, Bee, if I am with him. Isn't it wonderful, dear, that he should love a poor, insignificant creature like me? Oh! Bee, darling, you will teach me how to keep his love, won't you? I don't think I could bear it if anything came between us!"

Poor Beatrice, knowing what she did, how could she answer such a speech as this? She stroked the girl's bright hair with a soft, caressing touch, wondering how to reply.

"Nothing can come between you but death," she said, at last. "You both come of a race noted for their truth—your word is pledged, and with the house of Dene, their word is their bond."

"And you are not sorry, Bee?" pleaded the girl, wistfully—ah! how wistfully. "I know that I am not like the girls of his world; I am not bright and beautiful, I have nothing to give him but my heart; but I love him, Bee, and it shall be my life's aim to make him happy!"

"I am not sorry, dear," said Beatrice through her tears. "I have learned to love you, Dora, and I want you to be happy."

"But you are crying!"

"I am not very strong, excitement generally upsets me. And now, dear, I want to talk seriously to you. I am Alan's ambassadress. He thinks, and I think too, that it would be a pity for you to have a long engagement. I must be going home soon, and I should like to leave you Countess of St. Clare—in short, we all want you to fix your wedding for next month."

"Next month!"

"There's nothing to wait for," said Bee, with almost feverish eagerness; "nothing in the world. There are no relations to consult—no distant friends to summon. In deference to your grandfather's recent death the wedding must be almost a private one. There is nothing to prevent your being married next month if only you will consent."

She loved her fiancé as her own soul; if it was his wish she should come to him so soon why should she refuse? There were, as Bee said, urgent reasons for the haste. She could not remain much longer away from her own home. Dora could not remain at Castle St. Clare without her; it was the simplest, the most natural arrangement in the world that the marriage should be hastened.

So when the affianced pair went for a walk that afternoon, as they were returning through the chestnut avenue, Alan turned suddenly to his cousin.

"Has Bee told you my wishes? Are you going to oblige me, and let me make you Countess of St. Clare next month?"

She murmured an assent.

"I always had a fancy for being married on St. Valentine's Day," said Alan, dreamily; "we will fix our wedding for the fourteenth. If there is anyone you would like to invite tell Beatrice; she is very clever in such matters. We will leave all the arrangements to her."

He spoke as carelessly as though he had been discussing an evening party instead of a morning that could dawn hardly twice in his life. Alan was relieved when the eventful day was fixed; his brow cleared and he had plunged into a conversation on indifferent topics when they reached the castle.

"Who has arrived?" asked the Earl, for a carriage stood before the door, and servants were busy carrying in boxes.

"Miss Delaval," returned the butler. "There has been an accident, my lord, at Combe Manor, and the guests were obliged to disperse; so Miss Delaval came off here at once, without waiting to send word. She is in the boudoir with Mrs. Fane."

Dora Clifford felt a sudden shiver convulse her frame; at the moment she paid no attention to it—only wondered why she felt so cold and miserable. She knew afterwards that it was a presentiment of coming trouble—that the summer of her happiness was over, and she was entering upon the cold winter of neglect!

(To be continued.)

THERE is a story told of an early Australian governor which will bear re-telling. He was driving along a narrow bush track, for Macadam was not then known in the land, when suddenly his progress was barred by a lumbering bullock dray. The viceregal coachman called to the fellow to draw off to the side to let the carriage pass, but in vain. At last, highly exasperated, the Governor thrust his head out of the window and yelled out, "Do you know who I am?" The bullock-driver turned round. "I'm the Governor of the Colony," continued his Excellency. "Ah!" said the man, "then you've got a good billet—stick to it." And so saying he turned again to his bullocks, and drove them at the same steady pace right into Melbourne, followed by the indignant representative of Her Majesty and his no less indignant coachman.

ELECTRIC LIGHTING FOR THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.—The Edison system of incandescent lighting is to be introduced into the House of Commons, so far as the corridors and passages are concerned. The Edison Lamp will not, however, be used for lighting the House itself, as the gas has been found to answer all the requirements of the members and officers of the House. In many of the corridors and passages, especially those leading to the conference room, the tea room, and the library, the gas lights have been found rather ineffective; so much so, that where flights of stone steps had to be descended there was a certain danger of stumbling to persons with poor eyesight. In addition, the long series of stone steps by which ascent is made to the Reporters' Gallery has been, under the gas system, miserably lighted. All these defects will, it is hoped, be wholly remedied by the introduction of the Edison incandescent lamp.—*Electrician*.

SUNSHINE.—From an acorn weighing only a few grains a tree will grow for a hundred years or more, not only throwing off many pounds of leaves every year, but itself weighing several tons. If an orange twig is put in a box of earth and that earth weighed when the twig becomes a tree bearing fruit, there will be found to be very nearly the same quantity of earth. From careful experiments made by different scientific men, it is an ascertained fact that a very large part of the growth of the tree is derived from the sun, air and water, and a very little from the earth; and notably all vegetation becomes sickly if it is not freely exposed to sunshine. Wood and coal are but condensed sunshine, which contains three important elements, all equally essential to animal and vegetable life—magnesia is important to any of the tissues. Thus it is that the more persons are out of doors the more healthy they are and the longer they live. Every human being ought to have an hour or two of sunshine at noon in winter and in the early forenoon in summer.

AT THE GATE.

We stood in the mystic moonlight,
Last night, at the garden gate;
And Kate was watching the moonbeams,
And I was looking at Kate.
We talked of music, and flowers,
Of art, and science, and men;
Till the clock in the old gray tower
Struck plainly the hour of ten.
She turned and started to leave me,
With only a whispered "good-night;"
But I clasped her white hand closer,
And I held it firm and tight.
And said I: "A moment, Kate."
Said she: "'Tis getting late."
But still she lingered at the gate.
The nightingale's sweet notes rang out,
In music wild and gay;
And still we lingered at the gate—
I could not go away.
The silent stars kept watch above,
With laughing nod and peep;
The dew fell fast in crystal drops,
And kissed the flowers to sleep.
I drew her nearer to my side,
In silent raptur'd bliss.
"Ah! Kate," I cried, "be but my bride."
And sealed it with a kiss.
"Be but my bride, and wed me, Kate."
Said she: "Oh, yes. But 'tis so late."
And so we parted at the gate.

A. C.

PUT TO THE PROOF.

CHAPTER XIII.

Hans held her hair out of her eyes with one hand, and pointing to Carl with the other, said, in a voice shaken with emotion,—
"Father, how dare you bring that man here?"

"It's all right, my dear, don't excite yourself; he is only looking for young Mr. Paget, who, by some absurd mistake, he imagines is hiding here."

"What! in my bedroom! The supposition is an insult to me. Go! leave me in peace. Is not even my sick-room sacred?"

"Sacred to me, Miss Dicksie, as that of a holy nun," said Carl, looking at the little beauty, with eyes brim full of admiration.

Advancing a step he looked round the little room; there seemed no place in it big enough to hide a man.

Hero's wild, frightened eyes followed his nervously.

He advanced a step towards the bed and she cried out, indignantly,—

"Take him away, father—take him away! I should die if he touched me. He frightened me so on the cliff!"

"Come away, sir! You see the poor girl is ill, and it naturally upsets her to see you here."

Carl looked at the baggard, young face, with its burning eyes and wan, white cheeks, and felt ashamed that his suspicion had disturbed her.

Then, too, he had a lively horror of contagion, and it had been rumoured about that Dicksie's daughter had the fever, and she looked ill enough to have had fifty fevers.

Believing he was on a wrong scent, he left the room more than ever enamoured of Dicksie's daughter.

When he was out in the air again Dicksie drew himself to his full height, and said, with quiet dignity,—

"Sir, your suspicions have been an insult to me and my daughter. This is my home; and humble as it is, it is as worthy of respect as a palace, and shall be kept sacred from prying eyes. You have chosen to suspect me of harbouring a man, who, you say, is amenable to the law for a fearful crime. Now, I am an honest, upright man, and need brook no annoyance from you; and so, quite calmly and quietly, I promise you that if you come here

again with your spying, foreign ways I'll pick you up by that fine figure-head and the table-part of your breeches, and drop you into the sea as I would a thief of a tom-cat that I saw coming after my bird yonder."

He pointed to a lark that hung in a wicker cage, with trembling hand.

Carl looked uneasy.

Certainly Dicksie, so to speak, was king of the castle, and if he chose to call him a dirty rascal and bid him make himself scarce, all he could do was to obey.

His evil temper was roused, and he looked, what Dicksie would call, an ugly customer to tackle. But the old man's blood was up. In his time he had been as daring a Jack Tar as ever gladdened the heart of England's boast—Lord Nelson.

"I ain't afraid of the evil eyes, young fellow—so keep your fierce look to frighten women, folks. We blue jackets never showed the white feather under foreign fire yet; so suppose you take your skiff ashore?"

Dicksie held his heavy stick, and weighed it in his hand, suggestively.

Carl lighted a cigarette slowly, then, with a curt nod, began to descend the ladder, looking up sneeringly at Dicksie who leaned over the rail, and said, loudly,—

"Ta, ta! my old sea lion! but for the future look to that lovely little light o' love, your daughter; she'll give you some trouble yet. As to the story about the son, I'll get the police to inquire into that. It will be more satisfactory and save trouble."

"Never holloa till you are out of the wood. Remember, it will be a bad time for you if you show your face here again."

Carl paused, and was about to speak, but he did not seem to care to put the old man out any further, so hastened down, while Dicksie watched him with an amused chuckle.

When he saw the boat well on its way to the shore, he went in, and found Hero sobbing as if her heart would break, and Percy on his knees, trying to comfort her.

Dicksie filled and lighted his pipe, pretending to be quite unobservant of the little love-scene.

When Hero was quiet he said, huskily, as he stirred a saucepan of Irish stew on the fire,—

"Sailors are the best cooks in Christendom."

After a time Percy rose, and looking moodily out of the little window that boasted a pot of mignonette and some heliotrope, the sweet scent of which was wafted in pleasantly, said in a despondent voice,—

"Dicksie, I must clear out of this; I have brought trouble and vexation enough upon you. I can never forget your kindness; my own father could not have done more for me; and as to Hero,—ah! words are powerless to express the gratitude I feel for her devotion."

He turned impulsively, and laid his hand on Dicksie's shoulder, and continued, excitedly,—

"Dicksie, dear old friend, do you remember all the happy hours I spent here, when I was a bright happy boy, and you entertained me with sea-songs, never to be wearied of yarns, and Hero?"

"Aye, lad, I do."

"For the sake of that far back happy time, dear old friend, forgive me for blighting the life of your only child. You know my story, and have in your loyal belief in the boy you loved, taken my hand again in friendship—a blood-stained hand—that I have been tempted to turn against myself in the miserable madness of self-abasement. I must go from here; your home and Hero's must not be shadowed by my presence and the perpetual danger of discovery. I ought to have gone before; but I was so weak and ill, half my manhood seemed asleep, and it was so sweet to be tended by the dear hands of her I loved, and cheered by my old friend's faith in me."

Hero nestled up to him, and Dicksie's eyes grew dim as he looked at the sparkling wood fire, Percy continued,—

"You know, had not the fate of Cain fallen upon me, I should have returned, and made

my darling mistress of Paget Naze, and by economy and work restored the old place in course of years to its old standing, and none in the home should have been held in higher honour than my wife's father, my old friend and comrade Dicksie. But now all those happy dreams are ended. I must be an exile from home, a wanderer on the face of the earth, because of the sin of one mad moment. I deserve my punishment, I suppose, and will try to bear it as a man and a Paget. You know I am no coward, Dicksie, but I feel I cannot go on fighting as it were in the dark. I must give myself up—mine is a hopeless fate. I wish I had done so at first, and so have given my friends one blow instead of twenty."

Hero had thrown her arms about her lover's neck, and an agony of fear was in her face, as she said in a tone of sharp anguish,—

"No, no, you shall not give yourself up, it would kill me! Anything but that. I could bear anything but that."

Percy clasped her closer and smoothed her flossy hair, with the hand that had lain so confidently upon Dicksie's shoulder.

"Speak to him, father; tell him, for my sake, he must not do this."

Dicksie's voice was husky, as he said, looking at the handsome couple that seemed to his old eyes like a picture of Paul and Virginia in the summer sunlight,—

"No, lad, you must not even talk of giving yourself up; that weren't gratitude to us at all. Why, it would break my girl's heart, and disgrace that good woman, your mother, who to-day begins a new life as Lord Lexington's lady. Give yourself up! I wonder what your pretty sister would say to that? 'Tis not to be thought of; I'd rather pitch you over the rail there, and see you dashed to death on the rock beneath. Then at least only you would suffer; but if you gave yourself up broken hearts would be as plentiful as June roses. I can't hear of it lad, I can't think of it. You must hide here till you can get away in safety, and begin a new life in a new land. If you love my lass, don't torment her with such cruel talk."

"If I love her! Oh! sir, you know I love her; what else could bring me here? She is the light of my eyes, the pulse of my heart; but you do not know all."

"Not know all! Why, you don't mean to tell me you have killed anybody else out of the battlefield! Why, you make my hair stand on end; you're a regular walking tragedy in one act—a sort of condensed villain," said Dicksie, in mock horror, springing to his feet and confronting the lovers with a nervous air.

Percy shook his head sadly, and said, "No, old friend; 'tis not that. But send your thoughts back to the boy you used to hear spouting such high-faluting ideas about liberty, and all that sort of thing."

"Ah! I remember, my lad, that. I told you your Republican notions were not in keeping with your birth and breeding; and said if you persisted in them they would lead you into trouble."

"You were right, Dicksie. I would to Heaven I had listened to you! My mad notions did lead me into a trouble that makes me a doomed man. When I first went to Germany I became great friends with Herman Gonther, a red Republican. It was like setting fire to flax for me to listen to him, and I heard with delight that he believed all our impossible ideas of equality would come to pass. No matter what his opinions were, enough that they were the reverse of what a hot-headed, enthusiastic boy should hold. He quickly made a convert of me, and, after much persuasion, got me to join a secret society. My oath to them forbids me to reveal their mysteries; sufficient that they are thousands strong, and have a power in every State. They quickly discovered that I was not the desperate Republican they took me for, and I was quickly put under suspicion for being backward in joining their evil work. Now, even should the law hold me guiltless, they would not. As I said, I am a doomed man—doomed from the

hour of Herman Gonther's death. 'Tis their rule that if one of their members kill another, except that other proves a traitor to their cause, the man's life shall be forfeited; and no matter how cleverly a man may evade the law, their vengeance is sure and swift. I expect no mercy, for Herman was one of their most useful members. His persuasive tongue won many to join their ranks; it was his influence that actuated my want of zeal. Now it were best that I should throw myself upon the mercy of the law than live on in hiding; for, I believe,—

"Far happier are the dead than they
Who look for death and fear it every day."

Here was white as death, she lay heavily against her lover; while Dickie's ruddy cheeks had blanched, and his hand shook as with an ague, for he realised more fully than Hero what a dire power Percy had put himself under. But though he felt inclined to hold with Percy, the sight of his child's stricken face made him wish to persuade Percy to put off the day of reckoning as long as possible, and he said, sadly,—

"My poor boy, I pity you sincerely; but, like my girl, I do not see the sense of rushing into the lion's mouth. Try your best to save yourself, for Hero's sake; for as there is a Heaven above, I believe your death would kill her. You owe it to us to guard the life we have brought back from the very gates of death. You know I would advise you only for the best; so listen to me, lad, and take your chance. 'Tis a fight for life, and life in this case means more than one. Comfort my poor girl; she never had a trouble before that was beyond her old father's curing. Comfort her, lad, comfort her!"

With faltering step Dickie went out into the sunshine, his heart a dead weight within him, for next to Hero he loved Percy—the bright boy who had spent all his leisure in the lighthouse, cherishing it as only a lighthearted, merry boy can.

Dickie had cherished such grand hopes for his child when she should queen it in the country as mistress of Paget Naze. He never had doubted Percy's good faith, and believed the lad was born to restore the fortunes of his race. Now all his hopes were blighted, and he was an old man journeying fast towards another world. When he was gone there would be no one to guard his darling—no one to comfort her; for, knowing her as he did, he was convinced no one would ever fill Percy's place in her pure affections, and he feared Percy's case was hopeless.

He shivered in the warm sunlight as he imagined what the poor boy's fate would be; and somehow the dash of the waves against the rocks below seemed with a dirge-like sound to whisper the one word—*doomed*.

In the sunny, little sitting-room, where the notes of the lark sounded joyfully, Hero robbed on her lover's heart—sobbed in a dull, despairing way that made Percy feel heart-broken. All her plaint was, "Swear to save yourself, for my sake! Oh! if you love me you could not risk your life; my life is yours, and yours mine; we live or die together!"

So she pleaded, while the heaven of her eyes were drowned in the cruellest tears ever woman wept; and Percy, who loved her with all the force and passion of a faithful heart, could only promise anything she asked to comfort her, for the old man's heart-broken pleas hurt him like a stab. "Comfort my poor girl, lad, for 'tis the first trouble that has been beyond her old father's curing."

This had been the only reproach Dickie had given to the man who had brought such a surpassing sorrow upon the humble home of which Hero had so long been the good genius.

Much against his judgment, Percy promised all she asked, but firmly refused to stay there a day longer. They had borne enough for him, he said, and he would not tax them further.

"If I must hide," he said, "I'll hide at the Naze. I have a right there; it is my home."

"Do not leave me, Percy; I implore you to stay here. Father does not mind anything, so that I am happy; and I can never be happy again when you are away. I shall live in constant dread."

"My darling, I must be firm in this for my own sake. That man's presence here to-day shows they have put him on the right track at last. I shall be safer at home, dear, indeed I shall; and 'tis not fair to your father for me to stay here longer. I cannot express my deep gratitude for his goodness to me. Yours is part and parcel of your love, therefore is beyond gratitude. I will go to-night at any risk, and you must not try to dissuade me, for I must be firm in this for all our sakes."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE wedding-breakfast had passed off charmingly. What few guests there were were really entertained. When Lady Lexton rose from the table after cutting the cake, she put her hand on Vashti's shoulder, and said she needed no one but her daughter to help her dress to go away.

The June sunshine streamed in upon mother and daughter—two proud, fair women, who looked as sweet as the June roses, that made a fragrant scent among the decorations of the table.

When they left the room the gentlemen toasted both with hearty goodwill. Vashti and her mother went hand-in-hand up the old oak staircase in silence, a strange pain at their hearts—for this seemed to both a lasting separation, though they tried to argue themselves out of the idea.

The sunbeams seemed to follow them lovingly as they went; and when they entered their room—which they had shared together for the last time—Vashti threw her arms about her mother's neck, and said, fondly, "My own dear, beautiful mother, I hope that to-day you turn your back upon trouble for all time. I believe you will be very happy, and that alone reconciles me for losing you."

"Loving me, Vashti! How foolishly you talk my child. I shall not be gone more than two months at the longest, and then you are to come and live with us, and have a good time. The thought of all the happiness it will be in my power to give you consoles me for this parting. I wish, oh! I do wish I had news of my poor boy, before I began my new life, Vashti. I have dreamed night after night that he was in danger, and each time he has called out to me, 'Mother I am doomed!'"

"Oh! darling, do not indulge in such gloomy thoughts upon your wedding-day. Perhaps I may hear of him, and be able to send you good news while you are away. Do not look so sad, darling; Lord Lexton will not look for trouble in his bride's face. Let me help you to dress; all your boxes have gone on. There is only just this beautiful walking-dress to put on, and you will be ready."

Vashti lifted a lovely fawn-coloured plush and satin dress, with charming bead embroidery and a pretty princely bonnet to match. Everything was put to hand, even her masquerade gloves, satin fan, and fawn-coloured cashmere boots.

Vashti quickly unfastened her mother's bridal dress, and began to array her in her new costume.

Beryl was a woman to whom dress meant a real pleasure, and the tears dried on her lashes as she saw how lovely she looked.

"You are just perfect mother, dear!" said Vashti, kneeling to button her high boots. She would not let anyone do the simplest thing for her mother to-day, for she knew it would be the last time she should have the privilege she loved of making her mother look beautiful.

"I suppose your grand French maid will meet you at Charing-cross, mamma, and I shall never again be allowed to dress my mother, and turn her out a real work of art!"

"Now, Vashti, that sounds as if I made up,"

"Well, dearest, we know you don't. Come, I hear Trail coming along, with her modest pit-a-pat, like a mouse."

"Before she comes, Vashti, promise me you will keep our poor boy's secret, and help him should he need you. His life may depend on our discretion. Think of that—his beautiful young life. My heart misgives me about him, and a mother's fears are only too often true prophets."

"Mother, you may trust me; I will think of my brother before myself. His life is as dear as my own. Have no fear, mother; if all the world failed him, his sister would be true as steel."

"I believe you, darling! You are a noble woman; may Heaven reward you as you deserve. I leave my boy to you; if you should see or hear of him, tell him his mother's love follows him in exile, and her thoughts turn to him at all times, as the flowers turn to the sun. Good-bye, my daughter, Heaven bless you, and give you as good a husband as your mother has! Be kind to Rex; his is a lonely life."

Vashti lay a second in her mother's arms, her grey eyes misty with unshed tears, as she said, "Oh! how I shall miss you, darling!"

"Mark will console you, Vashti. We talked of you last night, and I have agreed to trust him with my pearl above price—my good, helpful daughter."

The mother pressed her lips fondly to her child's face, and then they turned and bade Trail come in. She brought a lovely bouquet of cream roses and a beautiful bunch of passion-flowers to fix at the bride's neck.

Beryl took the old woman's hand in hers and thanked her, as she whispered, in a quivering, old voice,—

"Good-bye, my lady, and may all good things go with you. You have been trouble enough; now has come your time for real lasting happiness."

"I hope so, Trail; and I shall never forget the faithful old friend who helped me through my troubles. You must promise to help my daughter, should she need you, as you have helped me. I leave her to your care, old friend, and know you will be faithful to the trust. Good-bye!"

Beryl pressed the old creature's hand kindly, then turned to shake hands with Peggy Dale, who had come from the Warren to see her mistress married.

Mrs. Trail had been a Dale before she married. She and Peggy were sisters—the last of their race. To them the fortunes of the Pagets was as dear as their own.

Peggy looked a little jealous till her mistress turned and spoke a kind, grateful, little speech, that recalled the good soul's past devotion.

A carriage waited to take the bride and bridegroom away, and the last glimpse Vashti had of her mother was a lovely, radiant face above a wealth of summer flowers.

Vashti's hand shook as Mark took it to lead her back into the house.

"You ought to be glad she has so good a chance of happiness, my darling. Of course, it is always hard to part even for a time with those we love; but if the parting is for their good we should be content."

"I am content—more than content; I am grateful to know mamma has someone to care for her, and make her happy. Look, Mark, if I did not believe it impossible to both, I should say Barbara and Rex were flirting!"

"It looks uncommonly like it, I must say," said Mark, with an amused smile, as he saw Rex and good, plain Barbara eating strawberries out of one plate and drinking together from a big bumper of champagne. "I think they would make a good match, don't you, Vashti?"

"Yes; but I do not think Rex will ever marry."

"Why not?"

"I can't explain, dear; I am not at liberty to betray his confidence."

"Then there is an obstacle!"

"Unfortunately, there is; but let's talk of something else, Mark. I hate to think of Rex's troubles. What do these folks intend to do for the rest of the day? It is beautifully fine, I should think we could get up an impromptu picnic."

"A good idea. I'll speak to the Major." Mark crossed over to where Rex and Barbara Rouse sat together in a cushioned window seat.

The wedding guests were all assembled in the drawing-room—a spacious apartment of the old style, with oval mirrors, a velvet and gold suite, some valuable statues, and rich Turkey rugs.

It was rarely that the grandeur of this room saw the light of day, and to Vashti it had a strange stately look.

Mark said the whole room was worthy of a palace, and he would not see it altered for all the high art furniture and upholstery in London.

Truly there were evident signs of the poverty of the place, in shabby hangings, and worn carpets, but it had, on the whole, a look of elegance.

Reclined to Mark's proposal with delight; he had just been wondering what he should do with his guests, until he could with decency turn them out.

"Let's charter all the boats there are to be got," said Mark, "and row to Usher's Creek; there is a dip in the cliff there where we could picnic, and the scenery is grand. There will be sands there at four, and there are some most romantic grottoes. We can get the folk here to push the remains of the breakfast, and plenty of wine and fruit, and so start in an hour. 'Tis light so late that we shall have lots of time, and I believe it would be enjoyable to all of us—'tis so stuffy in-doors."

"Yours is a splendid idea, Mark. I'll put it to the people at once; it shall be decided by a show of hands."

Rex gathered his guests together, and told them of Mark's proposal.

Every hand was uplifted, and in a few seconds Trail was put in possession of their wishes about hampers.

The few servants Paget Naze boasted were quickly set to work, and in less an hour the party set off, the only man-servant with the help of a boy carrying the hampers to the sea.

It was a wonderful day—bright, clear, sunny as a maiden's love dream.

The boats, with their gay freight, put off in good style. There was much laughter and some merry songs that waned with the wind like fairy laughter.

Mark picked out a tiny boat, that by its size offered an excuse for being alone with his lady-love, whose eyes were turned yearningly to the lighthouse; she was thinking of her brother.

All the weight of his secret seemed to lay upon her now. True it had been unshared by her mother, but she was sure of her help and sympathy if she had need of it.

It was very pleasant on the sea; there was a nice breeze blowing, and the sun turned the waves to gold.

Mark bent over his oars and said softly, "I am afraid you are fretting about being apart from your mother, darling; you must not do that; the time will soon pass, and directly she is settled at the Priory she will send for you."

"'Tis a grand old place you will be pleased with it. Few women can boast such a delightful home as your mother will have to welcome her only child to. I am only afraid that you will get so fond of it that I shall find it hard to persuade you to resign it for the humble home I must offer you."

"You know a woman's home is where her heart is, Mark. I would rather live in two rooms with you than share a palace with another. You are very generous to forgive mamma for having ousted you out of your place as she has done."

"Not generous, but simply just, dear; besides I am not yet supplanted. If Lady Lexton has a son I shall be; but I hope to be a father my-

self some day, so I must not begrudge my uncle an heir of his own. My uncle is very fond of you, Vashti, and is delighted at the idea of our marrying."

"He is very good and kind; I like him exceedingly. There is something so frank and genial about him, and he is always so jolly. No wonder this matter fell in love with him. I believe I could have done it myself if I had not loved you."

"I am glad you did not, dear. I should not like to feel murderous about one of my own people."

"How savagely you talk, Mark! One would believe you quite a bloodthirsty villain if they did not know you better."

Mark smiled and said earnestly, "I am afraid I am villainously jealous about you."

"I know you are, but I mean to cure you, of that."

"You must first cure me of loving you my queen. What a jolly laugh Miss Rouse has! One cannot here it without smiling. I wonder what's the joke now? The Major seems making himself immensely funny."

Vashti looked ahead to where the Major, with a white handkerchief over his head, was entertaining Barbara with some droll story.

"Rex has wonderful spirits," said Vashti, thinking of their secret trouble, and how hard she found it to be decently cheerful.

"Are you sure you are quite well, dearest?" asked Mark, seeing how the colour came and went in Vashti's face, and how heavy with pain her eyes were.

"I have a slight headache; it is only the excitement, or, perhaps, the champagne."

"We'll find a shady nook somewhere, where we can catch the sea breeze, and you shall have a long, quiet rest, darling."

Vashti smiled faintly at the thought of what a vast amount of rest her mind would want to restore it to its old tranquillity.

The pleasure-boats were hauled in at "Usher's Creek," a romantic inlet where the cliff dipped down, and yellow poppy flowers flaunted among the mossy turf. The cliff overhung and kept the place in shadow, and just there the sands were white, and the shingle fine and level. Along the shore, where here and there dotted small grottoes made by the ever-encroaching sea, the boats were anchored, and the merry party grouped together to decide what they should do.

"Let's paddle," said Rex, "'tis so enjoyable, and the girls can find a lot of seaweed and shells. Run away, girls, into a cavern calm and deep, and divest yourselves of your shoes and stockings; we'll have a frolic."

The ladies, all but Vashti, did his bidding; she went off with Mark to find a quiet place to rest. Rex looked roguish, as he saw them disappear, and said,—

"They are off for a heavy spoon. Be merciful, my merry men, and don't disturb them."

Vashti paused before a tiny recess, where the shingle was dry and shaded, and sat down, taking her hat off, that the breeze might blow on her forehead. Mark threw himself down beside her, and laid his head in her lap, saying,—

"This is delicious, my pet, isn't it?"

"Yes!" answered Vashti, smoothing his hair from his forehead, and stooping over him to press a soft kiss upon his face.

He put his hand up round her neck, and said,—

"You darling to kiss me of your own free will; do you know you are generally very stingy over the riches of your lips?"

"Am I, dear? Perhaps you like my caresses the better for their scarcity. Men must not be made too much of, or they are terribly masterful."

"Indeed! where did you gain so much wisdom? I shall fancy you were fibbing when you said I was your first sweetheart if you profess to know so much of man's nature."

"You know I could never tell you an untruth, Mark!"

"Of course I do, my honesty; but I was

only joking, dear. Do not look so grave. I like you just as you are—a sweet, modest, maidenly girl-love, that any man would be proud to win."

"Yet I would not have thee cold,
Neither backward or too bold;
For love that lasteth till 'tis old
Burneth not in waste."

sang he, softly, as he drew one of her soft hands to his lips and kissed it.

"I hope to Heaven that our love may live as long as our lives, unshadowed by mistrust," said the girl, seriously, after a pause.

There was such an intensity of love and fear in her voice that Mark sat up and took her in his arms, saying,—

"How sadly you speak, pet; have my jealous fits frightened you? Forget my mad words, dearest, and rely upon me always to make you happy."

Instead of answering him Vashti burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing—a wretched sense of insecurity and foreboding oppressed her, and tears came a blessed relief.

Mark was shocked, it was so rarely Vashti gave way to emotion.

He thought excitement had made her hysterical, and soothed her with tenderest words and caresses.

After a while she lay in his arms, worn out and weary.

They sat on in silence, and presently her lovely head drooped, and she slept.

Mark held his precious burden very tenderly, and looked out at the ever-changing sea with eyes that had a soul-awakened look.

He feared he had made his darling's heart ache by his jealous temper, and as he sat there with her soft breath upon his cheek he resolved in future to curb and stifle his great weakness; in fact, decided nothing should ever make him suspicious or jealous again.

CHAPTER XV.

MARK was very tender and considerate to Vashti for the remainder of that day, and when they returned to Paget Naze he was the maddest, merriest of the party.

Nothing would do after the ladies had rested but they should wind up a jolly day by an impromptu dance.

The drawing-room was hastily cleared, and the door that led into a tiny anti-room, where there was a piano, thrown open so that the guests could hear.

This piano was a splendid tone semi-grand, given to Vashti by Lord Lexton.

She had not played on it many times, and she was quite engrossed by the music, playing a new waltz Mark had given her.

She was all alone in the little nook, and smiled as she heard the dying feet of the dancers.

The wax candles in the piano sconces threw a feeble light about her, and the moonbeams came in the narrow window at her side, and lay upon her skirts, fringing them with light.

In the midst of the merriment Carl Gonther called to return a book he had borrowed from Rex; and, in spite of the Major's coolness, managed to stay and make himself agreeable to the ladies.

Vashti's cheeks flushed with indignation as he came to her side, and said, bending over her, so that his breath stirred the fleecy hair upon her forehead,—

"So your mother has made her market, and left the old dull life for ever. I am glad she has done so for all our sakes."

Vashti's fingers flew over the keys, and her eyes flashed a look of contempt, but she spoke not a word.

Her nerves seemed strung to cruellest tension; her brain felt on fire with a feeling of rage against this man who would torment her by his unwelcome presence, and she could see Mark scowling at her, and feeling desperate she said,—

"Go away! your presence here is an insult. I wonder you come where you know you are



[THE LIGHT OF HIS LIFE.]

not wanted. I should have thought you had more pride."

"The only thing in life I am proud of, Miss Paget, is power."

"And you fancy you have power?"

"I do not fancy—I know I have. I hold the fortune of this house in the hollow of my hand, and you know it."

"I know you are a scoundrel," said Vashti, impatiently.

Carl smoothed his chin with his strong, white hand, and smiled as he said, "We must not quarrel in public, Miss Paget. Come, let me take your place at the piano while you have a dance."

"No thanks! I am in no mood for dancing. I prefer to play; leave me in peace."

Carl turned on his heel with an evil smile; and Vashti played the "Lancers," and as the couples took their places, Vashti became sensible of a gentle tapping at the window. Her heart beat so fast that at first she feared to look round, lest what she should see should make her feel faint. The balcony that led quite the length of the drawing-room terminated outside the window where she sat.

Looking up, she saw a haggard, white face and a pair of burning eyes regarding her with a look of wild entreaty. She stifled a cry of fear as she looked; she dared not pause at her music, and she felt mad with alarm, for she recognised her brother, and dreaded that his enemy should see him, and so complete their defeat.

She shook her head warningly, and Percy showed her something that looked like a letter, then disappeared. Directly the dance ended she threw up the window, took the letter, and hastily concealed it. She was only just in time, for Mark came up mopping his face, and declared that if dancing was called work, people would want a guinea an hour for their labour, and then consider themselves badly paid."

Vashti smiled, and told him to get a cooler. Then she turned to Carl, who stood by, and to

his surprise said quite pleasantly, "I should be glad if you would take my place at the piano, Mr. Gunther; my head aches horribly?"

"Certainly I will. What would I not do to oblige Miss Paget!"

Vashti hastily passed on to her cousin's side, and said in a hurried undertone, "Keep the folks employed, I must not be followed. Sing the 'Midshipmite,' and get Carl Gunther to play your accompaniment."

Rex looked surprised, but one look at her troubled face told him she had a serious reason for her request. Mark was talking to Miss Rouse, but his eyes followed Vashti anxiously as she hastened away; flying to her own room she tore open the letter.

It was brief, and simply said, "Meet me in the chapel at once; I am in immediate danger."

Hastily snatching up a large dark cloak she hurried down a back staircase and out into the grounds. The moonlight made her path clear; she hurried on, and entered the deserted chapel that looked very weird in the chequered light that came through the long windows. The sound of her own footsteps seemed to frighten her. By the altar, just under his own monument, Percy stood well back in the shadows.

At sight of her he came forward, hastily saying, "Are we safe here?"

"Yes, I believe so. Oh! Percy, what in Heaven's name could make you mad enough to run such an awful risk! It was just a lucky chance that Carl Gunther did not see you; he was in the recess a second before you came. Oh! my dear, my dear! you are in awful danger."

"I know I am. Nothing but desperate peril would have induced me to frighten you by coming here. I must hide, dear; where can I go? I am too ill to travel; I nearly lost my balance climbing to the balcony."

"Why did you not stay a few days longer at the lighthouse?"

"I could not; Carl Gunther searched there

for me. I wish I had died days ago. I am a trouble to myself, and all belonging to me."

"Don't talk like that, dear old boy, it makes my heart ache. We must smuggle you into the turret apartment; you could lie *perdu* there without fear of discovery. The danger will be to get there. I don't know how to get you into the house unseen. There is one way. An old ladder stands on the balcony that would reach to my window. When the place is quiet and you can venture out with safety, come quickly to my room, and I will get you into the turret."

"But my dear girl, think how your fair fame would suffer should anyone see me enter your chamber. No, I will not do that; you must manage to let me in some other way. Fancy my having to sneak into my own house like a thief in the night! Tell me, how can you let me in?"

"I might let you in by the back staircase, dear, but there will be more risk. I will wait there at midnight, and when you come tap three times softly at the door, and either Rex or I will let you in. The house is so full now, that for the next few hours there will be no chance. Stay here, and for Heaven's sake do not venture out. Remember, that spy is on the watch."

"I am not likely to forget it, curse him! Go now, dear, you will be missed."

"I hate to leave you here alone, Percy; you look so ill, and your hands are as cold as death."

"I feel ill. Had I the strength I should have walked to the Warren, but I could not do it—I am so weak."

"Poor boy!" said Vashti, kissing him tenderly. Then she left him, and he sank into a seat, covering his face with his hands.

Vashti hastened out into the broad moonlight, her eyes tearful, and cast down.

She had not gone far when a hand was laid upon her arm, and the shadow of a man fell across her path. With a cry of fear she staggered back.

(To be continued.)



["I WILL GIVE THE PACKET TO YOU WHEN I RECEIVE THE OTHER FIFTY POUNDS, BUT NOT BEFORE," SAID THE FRENCHMAN.]

NOVELETTE.]

CECILE'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

The late afternoon sunlight was pouring in level rays through the old-fashioned bay windows of Brooke Court—a long, low, grey, stone building of uncertain architecture, but picturesque appearance, whose weather-beaten front was hidden by a mantle of ivy that reached up to the roof, and even trailed its green sprays across sundry of those tall gables that stood out so clearly and distinctly against the sky.

Brooke Court was looked upon by the people round as a very fine place, and its owner, Sir John Brooke, as a particularly fortunate young man, inasmuch as, at the age of twenty-nine, he had succeeded to one of the richest baronetcies in the kingdom, and, being still unmarried, was a most eligible *parti*.

On this particular afternoon—one early in September, when the leaves were just beginning to change their faded green for autumn ruddier tints—the Court drawing-room was tenanted by two ladies; the elder, Lady Brooke, a fair, patrician-looking woman of about forty-five; and the younger, a girl of nineteen or twenty, tall and slim, with a pair of magnificent hazel eyes, and a mass of bright, tinted hair.

This was Cecile Conway, Lady Brooke's niece, who had arrived at the Court an hour or two before.

"You have changed a good deal since I last saw you," Lady Brooke was saying, as she gazed into Cecile's bright young face. "But it is some time since we met—four or five years."

"It was just before I left England to go to school at Bruxelles," Cecile responded, clasping her hands idly across her knees, and gazing through the window at the landscape beyond—all aglow with the amber radiance of the dying

daylight. "I left Madame Lafarre's twelve months ago, and I stayed there nearly three years, so that will fix the date."

"How did you like school? Wasn't it rather dull?"

The girl's face flushed, and she turned it away; but she answered the question indifferently enough.

"Rather. You know one is kept so strictly in those foreign schools—never allowed to look through a window, or go outside the door, and the routine gets extremely monotonous."

"So monotonous that I wonder you did not try to enliven it by one of your madcap tricks; you used to be so very high-spirited," said Lady Brooke, laughing. "But I suppose a wholesome reverence for your father's authority kept you within bounds. Jack is very anxious to see you again; he is out shooting to-day with a friend who lives near—a Captain Elliot—but I expect him back every minute now."

"Then you have no visitors staying in the house with you?"

"No; one comes to-morrow—a Mrs. L'Estrange, whom we met at Nice last winter, and who you will be sure to admire."

"Is she handsome?" inquired Cecile, interested.

"Very! and, moreover, has rather a romantic history. She married Mr. L'Estrange—a man old enough to be her father—two years ago, and in less than twelve months he died, leaving her a rich widow. People say that before her marriage she was a professional singer, or something of that sort, but I don't know how true the story may be. Anyhow, she is received into the best society now, and Jack gave her a sort of general invitation to come and see us if she should chance to be in England. Both he and I had forgotten all about it until a week ago, when there came a letter from her, saying she was in London, and would spare us a few days if we could conveniently receive her; so, of course, I had no alternative but to write, and fix a date for her arrival."

Cecile made no reply, but went upstairs to dress for dinner; and all the while she was wondering what her cousin Jack was like, and whether he and she would be as good friends as in the old days, when, in spite of the difference in their ages, they used to play "hide-and-seek" together, and run races with each other through the gardens, and dim old corridors of the Court.

As soon as her toilette was completed she descended the wide, shallow old stairs into the hall, which was large and lofty, and there, standing in the shadow of curtains that fell over the recess of the window, and gazing out on the pale sky, where a few splashes of crimson was all that remained of the sunset colours which had painted the west so gorgeously a little while before stood a man, tall, broad shouldered, and athletic-looking, attired in brown velvet shooting jacket and knickerbockers, and with a powder flask slung across his chest.

This, Cecile decided, must be Jack, the cousin she had not seen since she was a child; and after a moment's hesitation she advanced gently behind him, and, by dint of standing on tiptoe, managed to reach light enough to clasp her slender hands across his eyes.

"Guess who it is!" she cried in her fresh young voice, and with a merry laugh that rang out as sweet and clear as silver bells.

For a minute he did not speak—perhaps surprise kept him silent—then, seizing her hands in his own, he turned round and drew her into the embrasure of the window, so that what little light remained fell full on both their faces, and Cecile saw that the gentleman she had treated in such a familiar manner was an utter stranger!

"I beg your pardon," she faltered, in a low, ashamed voice, "I—I thought you were my cousin Jack!"

"I am very much flattered by the mistake," he returned, bowing low, while an amused smile crept round his mustached

lips, "I think, perhaps, our backs may have a sort of family resemblance, but beyond that I don't fancy there are many points of similarity."

Cecile did not think so either now that she got a full view of him, for this man's face was handsome enough to have served as a sculptor's model—a face with large, long, lashed eyes, clearly-cut features, and a heavy brown moustache—quite different to Jack Brooke's good-natured, but plain physiognomy.

"Ah! but it was only your back I did see," she rejoined, rather archly, and, recovering a little from her confusion, "so perhaps, under the circumstances, and considering the dim light, you will accept my apologies."

"I beg you not to attempt any; I regard myself as the debtor of a lucky nodding. I don't know whether Sir John will feel inclined to evince equal philosophy when he learns what he has missed," he added quickly, and, stepping aside to let her pass. "Here comes the real Simon Pure, as we shall see."

Cecile's greeting to her cousin was much more subdued this time—so demure, in fact, that the young baronet laughingly told her she had acquired a repose of manner that he should never have credited her with, and then he proceeded to introduce the gentleman in the black ground—Captain Gervase Elliot—and wondered why Cecile grew rose-red at the presentation.

After all, Cecile's mistake was not without a balm to its sting, for it served as the basis of a sort of understanding between herself and the officer, that made them more friendly in one evening—for the captain stayed to dinner—than they might otherwise have become during a month's intercourse under ordinary conditions.

Captain Elliot could make himself very agreeable when he liked; and on the present occasion he did like, for he thought he had never seen a sweeter face than the one this girl possessed. And so he devoted himself to her amusement; and when, after dinner, they went to the drawing-room, and Cecile seated herself at the piano, he followed, with the avowed intention of turning over the leaves of her music.

The girl's fingers aimlessly struck a few chords that finally resulted in "Sweethearts" Valse.

"That is a lovely air!" he exclaimed quickly; "hackneyed as it has become, the beauty of the melody is still recognizable. And I like the words as well—don't you?"

"I ought to, for the sentiment they convey is complimentary to my sex."

"And the reverse to ours," he laughed. "Well, I suppose the poet is right, after all; but one naturally expects more faith from a woman than a man."

"Which is rather unfair!"

"Not at all," he responded, with unconscious egotism, "a man's fancy may rove many times ere it finally settles, but a woman's first love should be her only one. I know nothing more hateful than a fast girl—a girl who has had 'affairs' ever since her school days. Such an one would be the very last I should ever select for a wife."

"In this conversation 'private and confidential'?" asked Sir John, coming up at that moment, "or may I be permitted to inquire whether you are coming to-morrow to shoot with me in the Woodlands preserves, Elliot?"

"Certainly. I thought we had already fixed it so."

"Very well; then my mother and Cecile will meet us at about one o'clock, and we'll all have luncheon together—a sort of impromptu picnic. And, by-the-by, Elliot, I think you might just as well send a man over with your traps in the morning, and make the Court your head-quarters—you must be moped to death all alone in that little box of yours, with that grim old dragon of a housekeeper."

"Yes; pray come—we shall all be so pleased!" added Lady Brooke, cordially, and the officer hesitated and glanced at Cecile.

What he saw in her face it is impossible to say, but, at all events, he accepted the invitation.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning was the very perfection of a September day; the sky one wide expanse of unclouded azure, the air full of that mellow warmth that comes only in autumn.

Cecile and her aunt set out early, and after a pleasant walk through the woods, came to the appointed spot, and found the two gentlemen waiting to receive them. The luncheon hamper was already there, so nothing remained but to spread its contents on the moss that carpeted the ground with its close, soft velvet, and then sit down and discuss the dainties provided by Lady Brooke's matronly forethought.

The meal was a very pleasant one, enlivened as it was with gay badinage and merry laughter, and when it was over no one seemed inclined to move from the wooded solitude. Jack, who was tired with his morning's sport, stretched himself comfortably out on the ground with his head on his mother's lap, and his beloved meerschaum between his lips.

"What a pity life can't always wear such a pleasant aspect as it does after luncheon, on a day like this," he observed, lazily. "It is just the sort of afternoon when one appreciates to the full the delights of idleness."

"Enjoy it while you may, then," said his mother, laughing, "for these are your last hours of liberty. When Mrs. L'Estrange arrives you'll have to remember your duties as host, and devote yourself wholly and solely to her amusement."

The baronet made a wry face.

"I am half sorry she is coming!"

"What an ungrateful boy you are!" exclaimed Lady Brooke, secretly delighted at this expression of opinion on the part of her son; then, glancing at her watch, she started up, "It is actually three o'clock!" she said, "and at four I am to be at the station to meet our guest, so I have no time to lose. You can remain here, if you like, Cecile, and walk back later on."

"Yes—pray stay a little longer, Miss Conway," entreated Elliot, "I'll leave the partridges to themselves, and escort you home whenever you wish to go."

And—perhaps out of consideration for the partridges—Cecile allowed herself to be persuaded, so Jack walked part of the way with his mother, leaving the other two alone in the dim forest silence, which was unbroken save by the low twitter of the birds—too tired with their long summer songs to do more than express their happiness in a few, soft, cooing notes.

Outside the sun was pouring down a wealth of golden glory, but here only a few shafts penetrated through rifts in the woven screen of leaves, and fell in tremulous shadows on Cecile's bright head and slender fingers, busily engaged in weaving a wreath of ferns and grasses she had gathered on her way.

Elliot was somewhat of an artist, and was quite appreciative of the pretty picture the girl made, in her white dress, with a knot of scarlet poppies at the throat.

Indeed, he found it by no means unpleasant to lie stretched out thus on the mossy turf, and watch her deft fingers, while uttering such remarks as suggested themselves; and these were, for the most part, of a somewhat poetic nature.

Jack did not return. Perhaps he had ideas of his own on the subject of that arithmetical problem concerning the company of two and three. Perhaps he found the fascination of a nut-bush too much for him; anyhow, there he ensconced himself, and laid the foundation of a future attack of indigestion by consuming as many filberts as he could conveniently manage.

"I fancy we had better be thinking of returning home now," said Cecile at length, unwillingly it is true; for she, too, found the

subdued heat of the afternoon, the soft green shadows, and the snatches of Shelley, quoted by Captain Elliot, rather agreeable than otherwise.

Still, those slanting rays of sunlight told her the afternoon was waning, so she picked up her hat and sprang lightly to her feet, the officer following her example.

"We need not return the same way you came," he said, "I'll show you another route to the Court—a very pretty one."

It's beauty, however, was not its only advantage, for it was about double as far as the way through the woods—a fact that may possibly have had something to do with the officer's suggestion.

"There," he said, as they at last emerged into the high road, and he pointed towards a small, but pretty Gothic house, just visible above the treetops, "that is my shooting box, where I take up my abode from the 1st of September till Christmas. Hallo! What's this?"—his tone changing to one of alarm.

"This" was a cloud of white dust swiftly advancing towards them from behind a bend in the road, and a minute afterwards it proved to be the forerunner of Lady Brooke's little phaeton, which was being dragged along at a furious pace by a pair of ponies, whose glossy coats were flecked with foam, and who were evidently mad with terror.

In the carriage were Lady Brooke, another lady, and a footman behind. The former still held the reins, although they were not of the smallest use, for her hands had fallen helplessly on her lap, and there was a white terror in her face as she recognized the danger of her position.

The ponies, startled by a steam-engine they had just met, were entirely beyond her control, and Elliot saw at once that unless something were done to check their mad career, a serious accident must inevitably be the result.

He threw down his gun, waited until the carriage was just opposite, then dashed forward and seized the bridles.

It was an act of splendid daring, for the chances were two to one in favour of his being knocked down and trampled under foot by the excited animals, but, happily for him, he had calculated the distance to a hair's breadth, and his rapid action, added to the immense strength of his wrists, had the effect of a sudden check, and throwing them back on their hanches, brought them to a sudden standstill.

This the groom took advantage of by jumping out and running to Elliot's aid, and by the united efforts of the two men the ponies were soothed into something like subjection—their quivering flanks, however, still bearing witness to their excitement.

Directly Lady Brooke found she could do so without danger, she sprang from the carriage, and, turning to assist her companion, discovered she had fainted. Her exclamation brought Elliot to her side, and, seeing the cause of it, he lifted Mrs. L'Estrange gently from the carriage; and, taking a flask from his pocket, tried to pour some of the brandy it contained down her throat.

His efforts were assisted by Cecile, who had now come up, but the young girl was conscious of a curious sensation that was half pain, as she saw the widow in Elliot's arms; and although she chided herself angrily enough, all the same she bent forward very eagerly to see what sort of woman this was.

She was very beautiful—even a rival would have admitted so much. Her features were classically regular, her eyebrows and lashes fine and silky; the eyes themselves large and liquid, and with the innocent wondering expression of a child in their brown depths.

As soon as she regained consciousness, her gaze fell on Elliot; and, disengaging herself from his arms, she raised his hand impulsively to her lips.

"You have saved my life at the risk of your own!" she exclaimed, tragically. "How can I—how shall I, repay you?"

Elliot drew back rather embarrassed by her vehemence, and, turning to Lady Brooke, suggested that the whole party should adjourn to his house, and remain there until his dog-cart could be got ready to convey them home, and this plan was accordingly adopted.

CHAPTER III.

THE visitors at Brooke Court were fortunate in the weather, for the next few days were all that could be desired; and Lady Brooke, who was an excellent hostess, made the most of them by organising all sorts of pleasures—rides, drives, pic-nics, and garden-parties, at all of which Mrs. L'Estrange appeared in toilettes that were artistic triumphs, and were decided by feminine critics to be some of Worth's masterpieces.

Whether from feelings of gratitude, due to the service he had rendered her, or from admiration of his handsome person, the widow took a great fancy to Captain Elliot; and, moreover, made no attempt to conceal it.

Elliot was not a vain man, but he could not be altogether insensible to the delicate flattery she contrived to infuse in her manner towards himself; and, as a natural consequence, was very often at her side.

And so the September days went on, and as they passed, Cecile gradually awoke to the fact that the world seemed a different place now to what it had done before she came to Brooke Court. The sunshine seemed brighter, the flowers fairer—Nature herself more in harmony.

At first she did not question why this was. The fact itself was sufficient, and perhaps she feared to destroy the sweetness of her dream by trying to analyse it, and was content to drift down the current and let it land her where it would; but by degrees she comprehended, in a dim sort of way, that the intangible visions of her girlish fancy had at last taken shape, and her hero was found!

It had been arranged that they should make up a party and go to the theatre at W—, but when the day came Captain Elliot received a telegram, calling him to town on business, and he did not think he would be able to complete it in time to return for the performance.

Strange to say, when Mrs. L'Estrange heard this, all desire for going left her, and, complaining of a headache, she said very sweetly that if dear Lady Brooke would excuse her, she would remain at home.

"Dear Lady Brooke" had no alternative but to immolate herself at the altar of hospitality, and remain too; so Sir John and Cecile started alone, the latter bitterly disappointed at having only her cousin as her cavalier.

When they reached the theatre her face suddenly brightened, for there, on the steps, stood Captain Elliot waiting for them; and it is to be feared a little thrill of malicious triumph shot through her heart as she reflected on the widow's probable disappointment the next morning when she heard the fact of the officer's presence.

W— was not a large place; but the theatre was a new and extremely pretty one, and this being the night of the week there was a very fair audience. The party from the Court arrived just as the overture was commencing, and at once took their seats in a box close to the stage, from whence they could both see and be seen, and Sir John was soon engaged in pointing out to Cecile such of his friends as were present, while Elliot took up his glasses, and glanced round.

"How well that fellow plays the first violin," he remarked, as the music came to an end.

"And how interested he seems to be in our box," added Jack, looking at the individual referred to. "He absolutely cannot take his eyes away. By jove! Cecile, it is you he is staring at!"

This was true, for the musician—a good-looking but dissipated man of between thirty and forty, with dark eyes, and a black moustache—was gazing boldly at the young girl's

face, and as she looked down and saw him her own became deadly pale, and she shrank back behind the draperies, an expression in her eyes that Elliot, who was watching her, thought seemed like terror.

"What is the matter—do you know this man?" he asked, in a low voice, unheard by Jack, who was bowing to his numerous acquaintances; but the young girl only shook her head, without replying, and the officer of course could say no more.

When the curtain dropped on the first act, an attendant entered the box with a tray of ices, and Cecile, in obedience to Jack's command, took one. As she did so, the woman contrived to slip a note in her hand, unseen by the others.

A haughty flush of displeasure rose to Cecile's brow, and had she followed her first impulse she would have returned the missive at once; but while she hesitated the attendant quietly disappeared, and Cecile put the scrap of paper in her pocket, unread.

"Sir John Brooke's carriage stops the way!" shouted out an attendant, in stentorian tones, as they left the theatre; and Cecile, looking neither to the right or left, hastily entered the brougham, and uttered a sigh of relief as it was driven swiftly off in the direction of home.

She was very quiet during the drive, and as soon as the Court was reached excused herself on the plea of fatigue, and, wishing them all good-night, retired to her room, where she locked the door, and sank down in an arm-chair, hiding her face in her hands. Presently she took the note from her pocket, and read its contents, which ran thus:—

"I cannot tell you, *ma chère* Cecile, with what delight I look once more on your charming face, the sight of which has been denied me for two years. I fear, however, those two years have not been altogether favourable to the esteem I should wish you to cherish towards me, for there was no welcome in those pretty eyes as they fell upon me—rather repulsion, indeed, if one so fair as yourself could give birth to such a sentiment.

"But behold my kindness—my forbearance! I bear no malice for your treatment of me—there is not a shadow of resentment in my heart, only—I must see you, and soon. I have discovered that one of the gentlemen with you is Sir John Brooke—the 'Cousin Jack' of whom I have heard you speak—so no doubt you are staying at his place, which I find is about four miles distant. Now attached to such a house as Brooke Court there must be a lodge, and just outside the lodge I will await you at half-past seven o'clock on Sunday. I cannot come before on account of professional engagements. Let nothing prevent your meeting me, otherwise I may be compelled to take steps which I should regret, as compromising your good name.—Yours, "L. DUPONT."

The girl's face changed alternately from pale to red, as she perused these lines; each one instinct with a mocking triumph of power, and when she had finished, she began pacing excitedly up and down the room.

"What shall I do?" she exclaimed, piteously, wringing her hands. "I thought I had escaped all chance of his seeing me; but fate will not let me rest from the consequences of the past even yet. Oh! if Madame Lafarre were only alive, and could silence him again as she did before!"

And long into the night she sat up, pondering.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER breakfast, the next day, a ride was proposed, and Mrs. L'Estrange, on the pretext of being nervous of the animal she was riding, contrived to keep Elliot by her side during the whole of the morning. Jack was thus left to escort his cousin, and as they were passing the lodge, Cecile said,—

"Is old Betty still gatekeeper?"

"Yes," he responded; "but she is really unfit for the position—she is as deaf as a post,

and her eyesight is not very good either. I did say something about her retiring, but the mere notion made her so miserable that I had to give in and consent to her remaining on indefinitely—till she dies of old age, I suppose."

"And does she live alone?"

"All alone, and cultivates a misanthropic hatred of her species."

Cecile was thoughtful and pre-occupied during the ride—and, indeed, for the rest of the day; and not even Mrs. L'Estrange's efforts to engross Captain Elliot's attentions had power to rouse her, so, as Jack remarked to his mother, "the widow had her innings." And certainly she made the most of them, and left none of her charms untied in her endeavours to bring Elliot within the influence of their spell.

Late that night, as she was sitting in her dressing-room, having her hair brushed, she put rather a singular question to her maid—a sharp-featured, secretive-looking woman of between thirty and forty, who was less a servant than companion, for she was Mrs. L'Estrange's confidante; and if she did not share all her mistress's secrets was at least cognizant of a good many.

"Susan," said the widow, abruptly, "I am going to ask you something that I want answered *truthfully*—even though the truth may be unpleasant. Tell me, am I as attractive as that girl who is staying here now—Cecile Conway?"

"You are handsomer; but many people might prefer her for being younger," replied the woman, with stolid candour.

Mrs. L'Estrange sighed—a sigh that meant a lament for her fading youth.

"What made you compare yourself with her?" added Susan Fielding, after a pause.

"Because she is my rival."

"Rival—in what?"

"Love!" answered the widow, a sudden colour coming in her cheek, as she rose, and faced her maid. "Do you not find it strange"—with a constrained laugh—"that I, who have so often fooled men by feigning passion, should at last fall a victim to it myself?"

"I find it very strange," returned Susan, with dry incredulity.

"And yet it is true. I have played at love many times—have laughed at it in my heart, and told myself that for me at least no such weakness existed, and that I must be either above or beneath it. But now I find my mistake. Captain Elliot's courage saved my life the day those horses ran away, and from that very moment he has been to me, the incarnation of all that is bravest and best; and I love him—I love him—I love him!"

She spoke with vehement passion her eyes flashing and her bosom heaving under the influence of an emotion that was evidently genuine; while Susan looked on with a certain surprised dissatisfaction.

"You are better without a husband," she observed, bluntly. "You are comparatively safe now, whereas, if you were to marry this Captain Elliot, you would be in constant fear of his discovering your secret."

The widow's face grew pale, but she turned angrily on her companion.

"Why do you remind me of that?" she exclaimed. "You know I do my best to forget it; and surely you can let it rest in oblivion."

The following day was Sunday, and in accordance with their usual custom, the Brookes dined early, so as to allow the servants time to go to church. Mrs. L'Estrange had not been well all the afternoon—no fancied ailment, but a terrible headache that kept her a prisoner to her own room; and so Captain Elliot proposed that he and Cecile should walk over to Deepdale Church—which was about a mile and a half away—and get there in time for the evening service.

This offer the girl was forced to decline, and Elliot was struck with the confused manner that accompanied her refusal—indeed, a fit of restlessness seemed to have seized her, for after

moving uneasily about, pretending to arrange the flowers in the vases, she finally left the room and went upstairs to her own chamber. Arrived here she put on a large, dark cloak that completely concealed her dress, and slipped quietly downstairs, and out through a side door.

Now it happened that Mrs. L'Estrange's room had two windows—one looking on the terrace in front of the house, and the other on the shrubbery at the side. At the latter of these Susan Fielding was standing, and she thus caught sight of Cecile as she was leaving the Court.

"She has an appointment with Captain Elliot!" exclaimed Mrs. L'Estrange, when this intelligence was communicated to her, "Oh! if I were only well enough to be downstairs and prevent it! But Susan,"—dropping her voice—"you might follow, and see where she goes to."

The maid needed no second bidding, for such a mandate chimed in with her own inclinations. She loved intrigue for its own sake, and long practice had made her perfect in the art of following up a clue or ferreting out a secret.

Noiselessly as a shadow, she glided out through the door by which Cecile had made her exit, and then followed her at some distance, only pausing as she saw the young girl pass through the gates of the lodge, which was quite deserted, as old Betty had gone to church.

Running parallel with the avenue that led up to the Court was a plantation of larches and other trees, and thither, after going outside the lodge gates, and making a slight gesture with her hand, Cecile returned, walking round by the back of the lodge in order to enter it. She was followed by a man in a large, dark ulster and felt hat, that was pulled over his face, so as to conceal it.

The man was not Captain Elliot—of this much Susan instantly became assured; and her veins began to tingle with a pleasant sense of being on the verge of a discovery, as, protected by the shadow of the trees, she slipped quietly after them, and when they stopped, took up her position within a hollow tree that had an opening at the back, large enough to allow a person to get inside, and than which nothing could have been better adapted for her purpose, as it effectually screened her from view, while permitting her to hear all that passed.

"My dear Cecile," said a man's voice, low and caressing in tone, but rather husky, as if the speaker were suffering from a cold, "how shall I tell you the infinite pleasure I feel in meeting you once again! The—"

"Pray spare me such speeches," interrupted Cecile, coldly and contemptuously. "It was no regard for you that brought me here to-night. It was—"

"Regard for yourself!" he put in with a quiet laugh, as she paused. "Well, I will tell you why I wanted to see you. Since I saw you last, I have been unfortunate. Fate has not smiled on me, and the post I at present occupy, as leader of a very indifferent orchestra, is far from a lucrative one. Now my tastes are expensive, so you will readily see the conclusion pointed by these two facts, and at once understand that I am poor, and come to you for a loan."

"To me! When you know I have not a farthing beyond what my father allows me, and that only suffices for my own expenses."

"But you have rich relations, and it will be easy enough for you to procure a hundred pounds."

"You ask an impossibility. Five pounds is all I have left of my allowance; and even if I were to ask my father for more, he would decline giving it me."

"But I want the money, and the money I must have," he said, still blandly, but with an accent of threatening latent in his voice. "I have a bill due in a week from now, and somehow or other the money must be forthcoming."

"But why apply to me?"

"Because, *ma mignonne*, you are the only person I know in a position to help me—the only person to whose interest it is to do so."

"I don't understand you," said the girl, her tones not quite so steady as they might have been.

"No? Then I must explain myself better. I suppose you have not forgotten the little bundle of letters in my possession, written by you some two or three years ago? They are sweet letters—charming letters; but I am not quite sure that you would care for your father, or that gentleman who was at the theatre with you the other night, and who paid you so much attention, to see them—eh?"

There was no reply for a few moments—only a swift, passionate gesture on the part of the girl, as if to express utter contempt and abhorrence of her companion's treachery.

"But you *dare* not show those letters!" she exclaimed at length. "Madame Lafarre could punish you now, as she threatened to do before, if you betrayed my mad act."

"Madame Lafarre could do no such thing, simply because Madame Lafarre no longer exists," he responded, coolly. "Ah! *mademoiselle*, you are clever in trying to keep me ignorant of the death of your old governess; but, luckily for me, I am already aware of it, and also of the fact, that all *dangerous* papers have been destroyed. You understand? Well, then, you will perceive there is nothing to hold me back from producing those letters, or from revealing the finale."

"You would not do it. You *could* not be so treacherous—so unmanly!"

"Necessity forces one to many things one doesn't like," he observed, sentimentally; "and Poverty is a hard task-mistress. I think if you refuse to help me, your father will think it worth while to keep the affair silent. Still, I have no wish to proceed to extremities—get me the money, and I remain silent."

"And if—but I do not see the least chance of it—I could by any means get the hundred pounds, would you give me those letters, and swear to keep silence regarding the past?"

"Yes."

"But what guarantee should I have of your good faith? How do I know you would respect the sanctity of an oath—you who are so utterly unscrupulous?" she exclaimed, bitterly.

"You hit hard, *mademoiselle*, still I commend your prudence," he said, with a low bow. "Yet you need have no fear, for I have a very advantageous position offered me in New York, and if I can obtain sufficient money I shall accept it and start at once, with the probability of never returning."

At that moment the stable clock at the hall struck the hour, and Cecile started.

"I must return at once, or they will miss me!" she exclaimed, hastily. "I will think this over, and let you know the result in a day or two."

"But that will not suit me. I would suggest that you should procure the money, and bring it to me here, at about this time next Thursday, and then I will deliver over the letters."

"Very well, I will try my best," she returned desperately; and then, without a word of adieu, she ran back, through the plantation this time instead of the avenue, and came out just by the shrubbery—a shorter way than the one she had before adopted.

There were no lights as yet in the drawing-room windows, so she supposed its inmates were still occupied as she had left them, and therefore hoped to get indoors unseen. But she was doomed to disappointment, for on the terrace she was met by Captain Elliot.

"We have been wondering what had become of you!" he said. "Where have you been?"

"In the avenue—for a little walk," she answered, a queer sort of catch in her voice, for although circumstances had forced her into an equivocal position, Cecile hated a falsehood. "I haven't been long away, have I?"

"Long enough to be missed," he answered, rather wondering at the constraint in her manner; "and too long for your own health,

for the air has grown quite chilly, and shouldn't wonder if you had caught cold."

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE Susan Fielding, delighted at the thought of her own ascension, repeated to her mistress all that had taken place between Cecile and the stranger—a recital listened to by the widow with the deepest attention. When it was finished, she started up, and clasped her hands together triumphantly. "Now I see my way clear!" she exclaimed, drawing a long, deep breath. "Let Elliot once be convinced of these meetings, and the fact that Cecile Conway's name has a stain on it, and he will never dream of making her his wife. This man must have some hold on her, and the secret of it is contained in those letters. Susan"—impressively—"I must get those letters in my possession."

Susan only replied by an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

"I must get those letters," repeated the widow; "and with their contents to aid me, it will be strange indeed if I cannot contrive to transfer Elliot's incipient passion for Cecile into a deeper one for myself!"

"How is it you are not out shooting?" asked Cecile, a few mornings later, of Sir John, who she met crossing the hall on his way to his study.

"Because I thought I'd give the dogs a day's rest, and clean my guns," he answered.

"Is the operation interesting?" languidly inquired Mrs. L'Estrange, arranging, as she spoke, a button-hole for Elliot, who was standing at her side. "Can we look on?"

"Certainly," Jack responded, but not with any particular amount of cordiality, for he had a rooted aversion to anything feminine in his own particular sanctum. However, he led the way, and they all followed into an apartment, littered from end to end with every variety of masculine untidiness—pipes, guns, sticks, hunting-crops, boxing-gloves, newspapers, and beer bottles, being mingled in inextricable confusion.

Its owner did not think it worth while to apologise for the reigning chaos, but went on with his gun-cleaning while the ladies amused themselves by an examination of Jack's armoury, in which were several quaint and curious weapons.

"What lovely little things!" exclaimed Mrs. L'Estrange, taking up a pair of small, silver-mounted and finely-chased revolvers. "They look like toys."

"Rather dangerous ones," rejoined Jack, glancing up from his employment.

"Aren't they pretty, Miss Conway!" added the widow, holding them out for Cecile's inspection. "Would you ever think such innocent-looking things could prove so deadly?"

"They are like women," said the baronet—then hastily remembering himself—"I mean, like *some* women."

"You nearly put your foot in it, Jack," Cecile remarked, laughing, and examining one of the pistols she held in her hand. "But really, these are very pretty; I shouldn't mind possessing one myself, just for the fun of the thing."

Jack immediately begged her to take one, and presented the other to Mrs. L'Estrange. And at Elliot's suggestion a target was set up, and the two ladies began to practice with their newly-acquired possessions, under his superintendence, until the arrival of the post-bag made Cecile hurry indoors.

Jack unlocked the bag, and threw a missive into her lap, which she retired to the window to read, her face growing pale, and her hands clasping themselves together as she finished. It was from her father, refusing her the hundred pounds.

"What's the matter with you, Cec?" inquired Jack, looking up from his own correspondence, and observing his cousin's blanched face. "Any ill news?"

Cecile hesitated a moment, and rapidly

reviewed her position. She knew Dupont quite well enough to be aware that if she did not comply with his demands he would not hesitate to revenge himself by showing those letters both to her father, and perhaps Elliot. The anger of the former—a man of strictest ideas—would be terrible, and she feared to brave it; while as to Elliot, the mere notion of his becoming cognizant of that madness of the past, by means of any lips save her own, was beyond endurance.

Jack was waiting for an answer, but before giving it she closed the door, and came and put her head on his shoulder.

"No, there is no bad news. But I am in trouble, and you can help me if you will," she said, speaking very rapidly. "I want some money, Jack—a hundred pounds—can you lend it me?"

The baronet looked astonished—as well he might, for he knew her allowance to be a sufficient one, and could think of nothing for which she should require so much.

"One hundred pounds!" he repeated. "That's a good deal for you. So it is a millinery bill?"

"Yes, if you like, Jack, but don't ask me," she answered, a deep blush mantling her cheeks; and directly the words were out, she would have given anything to recall them.

"Well," Jack said, immediately, "I'll get you the money, little woman; but it won't be to-day, for I haven't a single blank cheque left."

"I would rather have notes than a cheque."

"All right. I shall be going to the bank to-morrow, and will bring the cash home with me in the afternoon. Will that do?"

"Yes; and thank you very much for your goodness. But, Jack—be sure, don't let anyone in the world know of this!"

He nodded assent, and she left the room; while he still sat there, his brows knit together in a frown of puzzled wonderment.

Mrs. L'Estrange's toilette took a considerable time to arrange, and the regulation half-hour was hardly long enough to produce the magnificent effects she usually aimed at; consequently Cecile, who have neither paint or powder to apply, found herself, as a rule, first.

On this evening she was earlier than usual, and finding no one else down, she took up her favourite position in the recess of the hall window, and was presently joined by Elliot.

"Don't go away," he said, as she prepared to move out, "I have something to say to you—something I have wanted to say for two or three days, only you haven't given me an opportunity"—thanks to the widow's clever manoeuvres! "Can you guess what it is, Cecile?"

She did not try to, but a lovely blush rose to her face; and then, in the very spot where he first met her, he whispered that story that is as old as the world itself, but which even thousands of years have not robbed of its freshness. And to Cecile there came a few minutes of perfect happiness—such as she had never even dreamed of before.

"But, Gervase, are you sure—quite sure—it is me you love, and not Mrs. L'Estrange?" she asked presently.

"Sure—quite sure!"

"Still, she is very beautiful—far more beautiful than I!" pursued Cecile, with a girl's morbid faculty of self-torment.

"Perhaps so; and perhaps"—with candour—"if I had met her without seeing you, I might have been caught. But why speak of that, darling?" he exclaimed, with a lover's unconscious egotism. "Let us talk of ourselves."

There was a faint rustling behind the curtains that shut them off from the hall, but they were too intent on each other to notice it, and it was not repeated. Still, in spite of her happiness, an icy chill struck through Cecile's veins as she thought of Dupont, and she was almost on the point of confessing all to Gervase, and throwing herself on his forgiveness.

Then she recollected how he had once said his wife must be like Caesar's—above suspicion

and the remembrance made her shrink. No, she loved him intensely—so passionately, that she dare not run the risk; she must wait awhile, until his own affection had been strengthened and riveted by Time. At any rate, she would have a few short hours of perfect enjoyment, and then—well, the day's evil was sufficient unto itself!

And, meanwhile, up in her bedroom, prone on the couch, and in an attitude of complete abandonment—heedless of the rich laces she was crushing—heedless of the eyes of her waiting-maid—heedless of everything save her own sense of dull misery, lay Mrs. L'Estrange, her heart absolutely torn by the two demons of love and jealousy.

She had been behind the curtains during the latter part of Elliot's interview with Cecile, and, in addition to his declaration, had heard the remarks referring to her pain, which had the effect of aggravating her pain.

"He might have cared for me, if she had not come between us!" she muttered, between her set teeth. "Oh! how I hate her—how I hate her!"

Susan Fielding was rather alarmed at her mistress's vehement passion, and did all she could to calm it.

"If you don't go down to dinner, they will wonder at your absence," she said. "And, besides,"—dropping her voice—"you cut yourself off from all chance of dividing Captain Elliot and Miss Conway, unless you keep your self-possession, and find out this secret of hers."

She could not have adopted a better line of argument, or one more calculated to restore the widow's powers of restraint. Mrs. L'Estrange got up, and proceeded to arrange her disordered toilette.

"You are right," she said, in a low sibilant whisper. "I require all my nerve now, for I have sworn to separate these two, and, by fair means or foul, I will do it!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day Sir John and Elliot rode over to W—, where the former was due at some local meeting necessitating his attendance, and the latter had made an engagement to mess with the officers of the regiment quartered there. He would have broken it if he could, but—as he observed to Cecile in a tone of deep disgust—he could not possibly manage it by means of an excuse.

"And so I shall not be back till evening, my darling," he whispered, ruefully, when saying good-bye to her in the conservatory. But, strange to say, her face appeared to grow brighter at the intelligence, and she even breathed a sigh of relief.

This was the day on which she would have to keep her appointment with Dupont, and, naturally enough, a load of anxiety was removed from her mind at the idea of getting to the rendezvous without running the risk of being followed by her lover.

Elliot rode away disappointed, and disposed to return irritable answers to Jack's remarks during their ride. It seemed to him Cecile had not manifested sufficient regret at the prospect of his absence; and added to this was a sense of resentment at her desire that their engagement should be kept secret.

If he could have looked into the girl's heart he would have seen no lack of love, but an infinite pain, for Cecile was racked with the warfare circumstances forced her to wage against the natural openness and candour of her disposition.

"Have I won his love under false pretences?" she said to herself, while pacing up and down the terrace, waiting for Jack's return.

"Would it not have been better to have told him all last night? Ah! no, I could not have borne just then to see the lovelight fading from his eyes, and replaced by anger—perhaps contempt."

When her cousin returned she followed him into his study, and waited impatiently while he seated himself in front of his writing-table,

and drew from his pocket a leather-covered case.

"I'm afraid you'll be rather disappointed, Cecile," he said, apologetically, "for I have only brought you half the amount you require. I am very sorry," he added, seeing the look of blank dismay that overspread her face. "As a matter of fact, I did get the hundred pounds, and while I was at the hotel, Elliot, who hadn't his cheque-book with him, asked me to lend him fifty to pay for a horse he had taken a fancy to, and when I went to the bank to draw another fifty, I found it closed. I left word the notes were to be sent on first thing to-morrow morning—will that be in time for your purpose?"

"I must make it so, I suppose," she returned, bitterly disappointed, and holding out her hand for the rouleau of notes he still held.

"Wait a moment," replied Jack, dipping a pen in the ink, and taking the numbers—a proceeding viewed by Cecile with some quietude.

"That is not requisite!" she exclaimed, impatiently.

"Excuse me, such an assertion is premature. You never know what may happen, and it is certainly best to be on the safe side. Besides, it is a business habit I invariably practise."

After he had finished, he handed the notes to his cousin, who took them with a few words of thanks, and then hurried away.

Both Jack and his mother noticed a certain strange inquietude in Cecile's manner that evening, and also observed that she had little or no appetite.

In answer to her aunt's remonstrances because she did not eat anything, the girl made the usual plea of a "headache," and directly the meal was over hurried upstairs; while Jack repaired to his study, there to smoke a pipe and read the paper, and Lady Brooke in the drawing-room, prepared for her usual nap.

The widow waited until she saw her hostess's eyes close, and then she too quitted the apartment for her own, where Susan Fielding was standing at the window to keep watch.

"Has Miss Conway gone out?" asked Mrs. L'Estrange; and receiving a negative reply, she added,—

"Then I will hurry to the plantation so as to get there first, and run no risk of being seen," and, wrapping a black lace shawl round her shoulders, she prepared to carry her design into execution.

She had no difficulty in finding the hollow tree spoken of by Susan, but hardly had she ensconced herself inside, when Dupont made his appearance, dressed as before in the large ulster and felt hat. He glanced round, and seeing no one, proceeded to light a cigarette, and then took up his position a yard or two distant from the tree which served as a screen to the widow, but with his back towards it; and a few minutes later he was joined by Cecile, who hastily cut short his greetings, with a—

"Let us come to business, if you please."

"Certainly, *ma belle*; and I am the more willing as I have increased my claim to an extent that renders talking difficult," he replied, in a voice whose huskiness corroborated his assertion. "Have you brought the money?"

"I have brought fifty pounds."

"Only fifty! But I cannot complete my plans with that."

"I will send you the rest to-morrow, certain," she said, giving the notes into his hands. "And now let me have my letters."

"Not so fast, if you please. I promised you those letters on condition you gave me a hundred pounds, and as you have failed to fulfil your part of the bargain, why I really do not see why I should keep mine!"

"But I tell you I will let you have the rest to-morrow—are you not content to take my word?"

"You should not ask awkward questions, Cecile; it would be ungentlemanly to say 'no,' but the world has treated me so badly that it is natural I should distrust it. Besides, a hundred things might happen to prevent you—and then

with the letters out of my possession, where should I be? No, *ma belle*, I will come here again to-morrow night if you will, and will give the packet to you when I receive the other fifty pounds, but not before. A bargain is a bargain, and I will stick to the one I made."

All her entreaties and persuasions were useless; and when she had exhausted both, she finally agreed to meet him the following evening and give him the extra money, in return for her letters. Then she left him, and he came out a little more into the open, and examined each note separately, before finally putting them away in his pocket.

"Good!" he muttered aloud, pushing his hat from his brow, and buttoning up his coat; "I see she is willing to play me fair; and I don't think it would have benefited me to go to her father, for he would probably have turned me out of the house. It is better as it is!"

Just then he felt a light touch on his shoulder. It was the widow, who had come from her concealment for the purpose of offering him a larger sum for the letters than Cecile had promised to bring. As she touched him he turned, and the starlight shone on both their faces.

CHAPTER VII.

SIR JOHN BROOKE sat in his study smoking, and indulging in meditations, of which Cecile formed the subject. He was very fond of his cousin—fond of her in the same way as a brother is of his sister—and her demeanour lately had not only puzzled him, but given birth to the suspicion that she was in some sort of dilemma from which she did not know how to extricate herself.

"She is afraid to confide in me as it is," he pondered, watching the blue smoke-clouds curl lazily above his head; "but perhaps if I were to broach the subject—were to offer her my help—she might tell me what is the matter. By Jove! I will try it, and at once, too."

He rose from his chair, and went out into the hall, where he met his mother's maid.

"See if Miss Conway is in her room?" he said, and waited while the girl went upstairs and returned with the news that Miss Conway was not there; so deciding she must be somewhere in the grounds the baronet strolled out.

It was a lovely September evening—not dark yet, although the stars were coming out in the azure vault above, and a faint streak of amber marked where the sun had gone down. Faint odours of laceroses and dewy mignonette were blowing about, and the air was very still—still with that brooding sort of silence that frequently precedes a storm.

Jack sauntered quietly on towards the avenue, still smoking, and with his hands thrust into his jacket pocket, for he had changed his dress-coat for one more congenial to his ideas of comfort.

All at once there rang out, clear and distinct on the quiet night air, the report of a shot, apparently fired very little distance away; and Jack, who had now reached the top of the avenue, came to a standstill, and, taking his pipe from his mouth, remained for some moments in a listening attitude.

"Poachers, I suppose," he said, at length, half audibly. "Confound their impudence! They have proved themselves pretty daring already, but I hardly thought they would venture so close to the house, especially at this early hour!"

He waited for a minute or two, but the sound was not repeated; and then, at as rapid a stride as his long legs could accomplish, he went down the avenue, and keeping in the dense shadow of the trees came into collision with a slender, black-robed figure, whose swift run came to a sudden standstill.

"Hullo! Who is it?" exclaimed Jack, keeping a tight hold of her arm; then peering down. "Why—Cecile!"

"Yes!" returned the girl, in a shaken whisper, "it is I."

"You are trembling like a leaf," he said,

drawing her arm within his own. "Was it that shot that frightened you?"

"I suppose it was. What do you think caused it?"

"I don't know; but it sounded as if it came from somewhere near the lodge, and I was just on my way to see. I happened to be in the avenue when I heard it, otherwise I should have taken the shorter cut, through the shrubbery and plantation. Will you come with me, and help to clear the mystery?"

"No, no!" she said, a little wildly, and clinging to his arm. "It is getting so dark in the shadow of the trees that I am afraid to enter the plantation. I don't even like walking up here alone. You'll come home with me, won't you?"

"To be sure I will," he answered, reassuringly, but looking rather surprised, nevertheless, for he knew that as a rule his cousin was far from a timid girl. "But there's nothing to be alarmed at—nothing at all."

"I know that, and I suppose I am very silly. One can't help feeling nervous at times, can one?"—with a faint smile. "Hush!" she exclaimed, stopping, "is not that the sound of horses' hoofs? Perhaps Captain Elliot has returned earlier than he expected."

They paused, and waited for three or four minutes, and then Cecile's surmise proved correct; and Elliot rode through the lodge gates, but dismounted a little way farther up the avenue on hearing their voices—it was growing too dark to distinguish forms now in the shadow of the chestnuts.

They all walked up to the house together, and Jack's first action was to go to the dining-room, where the decanters stood on the table, and pour out a glass of wine for Cecile, who still seemed nervous and excited. Then he crossed to the drawing-room and looked in.

"Hullo! how is it you are all in darkness?" he exclaimed, dimly discerning the form of his mother in an arm-chair, and that of Mrs. L'Estrange on a couch near the window.

"It was my doing," said the widow. "Lady Brooke knew my fancy for sitting in the dusk, and so I did not ring for lights."

"The fact is, I have only just awoken," her ladyship admitted candidly. "But pray, Jack, tell the servant to bring lights at once."

As soon as the baronet had complied with this request, he suggested to Elliot that they should go down to the plantation, and take a man with a dark lantern, so as to see if there were any signs to clear up the mystery of the shot, and Elliot at once agreed, as Cecile had already disappeared, and he was not particularly desirous of a conversation with the widow.

One of the grooms was called, and then all three started, passing through the shrubbery, and so on to the plantation. Here they proceeded very cautiously, examining every bush or tree that might give refuge to anything larger than a rabbit, but their search was unavailing, for only the startled cry of a bird disturbed from his rest, or the discordant shriek of an owl, broke the utter silence that reigned.

It was very dark; the starlight could hardly penetrate through the branches that arched overhead, and formed so dense a screen that even in the day-time there was only a semi-twilight beneath, and in the stillness even the shaking of a bough, or the faint rustling of the dead leaves beneath their feet, was distinctly audible.

"I'm afraid we have come on a wild goose chase," observed Jack, ruefully; "either the person who fired the shot has decamped, or the report did not come from the plantation at all—and yet I could have sworn it was in this direction, too."

The groom who carried the lantern, and who was looking with dark suspicion at the most harmless blackberry bush, and prodding at every mound or hillock with a stick he had brought in case it should be required, suddenly gave vent to an exclamation of triumph.

"So I've found ye at last, ye impudent poacherin' raskill!" he exclaimed, exultantly. "You've let us a pretty dance, but ye don't go on with yer games any more this night."

Sir John and Elliot hastened to him, and found him kneeling above the figure of a man, which was lying on its side immovable.

"Now then, why don't you get up?" said the groom, but there was a strange sort of quaver in his voice as he threw the light of the lantern on the prostrate man, and he drew back with a shiver of apprehension.

For a moment both Elliot and the baronet were silent, staring at each other as if awed by a fear neither dare put in words; then the latter bent down, and placed his hand on the man's arm. He drew it away instantly, and uttering an exclamation of horror, for it had touched something wet—blood!

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed, "The poor fellow is wounded!"

Aye, wounded with a wound that no mortal skill could ever cure—struck down, there in the darkness and silence of the September night—sent unshriven, unprepared, unrepentant, to the great Throne of Judgment!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE horror of the three men as they found that the body, although yet warm, was lifeless, may be imagined. There could be no doubt a murder had been committed; and murder, when you read of it in the newspaper—and murder, when it is suddenly brought home to you as having taken place within a stone's throw of your own home, are two widely different things.

The faint rays of the lantern fell on the dead man's face—a face that, with the strange expression of lofty repose, death sometimes sets on the meanest countenances, looked absolutely beautiful; but Elliot drew back with a cry of recognition, for he had a perfect recollection of the features, and also the circumstances under which he had seen them.

"It is the man who led the orchestra at the theatre!" he exclaimed, in an awestruck whisper. It seemed like desecration to speak in ordinary tones in that ghastly presence.

Jack was quick in deciding on what steps to take. Careless and nonchalant as he was, he could yet, on occasion, exhibit a considerable amount of self-possession and practical common sense.

"Elliot," he said, "take the fastest horse in the stable and drive in the dog-cart to W—. Go to the police-station, tell them there what has occurred, and bring a detective and a surgeon back with you. Jones and I will remain here till you return, so that the doctor may see the position of the body, and gather what information he can from it."

Elliot lost no time in obeying, and a few minutes later he was being borne along the turnpike road at a pace that almost took his breath away. Long afterwards that drive, and the speed with which it was accomplished, was talked of and wondered at throughout the length and breadth of the county.

It took the young man very little time to procure a surgeon and a couple of police officers, one of whom, by title Inspector Groves, was considered the sharpest man in the local force. To him Elliot related, as they went along, all that was known of the affair—little enough to be told in a few brief sentences.

As soon as they arrived at the lodge they left the cart in charge of a boy, and joined the baronet, who had not moved from his post, and who was impatiently waiting their advent. A hasty examination of the body convinced the surgeon that the wounds in the side could not possibly have been self-inflicted, and then Groves took possession of all the contents of the dead man's pockets, and proceeded to search for any traces that might remain of the murderers.

He had not far to look, for in a hollow there close by, embedded in a mass of dry leaves at the bottom, he found the weapon with which the foul deed had probably been committed—a small, silver-mounted revolver—at the sight of which both Elliot and Sir John grew pale.

"You evidently recognise this," said Groves,

eyeing them sharply; "does it belong to either of you gentlemen?"

"No, but it *did* belong to me a week ago," returned the baronet. "I had two pistols alike, and I gave them away."

"Whom, may I ask?"

"The ladies staying in my house—Mrs. L'Estrange, and my cousin, Miss Conway."

"Are they still at the Court?"

"They were an hour or two ago. They have both been practising shooting at a target to-day, and will no doubt be able to explain the fact of the pistol being in the tree."

"We will hope so," was the dry response, and then a litter was constructed, and the body borne in solemn silence through the plantation, and to the door of The Court.

On the threshold waiting for them stood a slight, girlish figure, and before anyone could draw her back, Cecile had understood, as if by intuition, the meaning of the dreary procession, and fixed her eyes on the waxen features of the dead man.

"It is Léon Dupont!" she said, in a strange, strained whisper, her white face growing whiter than before; and as she spoke the dread and horror of the scene, added to her previous excitement, completely overcame her, and she fell for ward in a dead faint.

Elliot took her in his arms, and bore her to the drawing-room, where Lady Brooke, unaware as yet of what had taken place, attended to her; then he joined the others in the library.

"Your cousin was evidently acquainted with Mr. Dupont?" the detective was saying interrogatively to Jack.

"It seems so, but I was not aware of it. I knew she saw him at the theatre the other night, but I imagined it was for the first time."

"Then no sign of recognition passed between them?"

"No—oh, stay! Cecile certainly did seem disturbed, and his close scrutiny annoyed her, for she drew back behind the curtains of the box. But why do you ask these questions?"

The inspector did not answer; he was examining the various papers he had found in Dupont's pockets.

"The motive of the murder was not robbery, for here are his watch and chain, and five ten-pound notes," he remarked, presently; "perhaps the numbers of these notes may be useful to us. Will you kindly put them down, Sir John?"

He read them over, and as he did so the baronet started violently, and put his hand to his brow—they were the same ones he had written down earlier in the day. What could be the meaning of this coincidence?

"You know something about these notes, Sir John," added Groves, with an air of quiet conviction. "Please tell me, whatever it may be. Remember, it is your duty to further the interests of justice."

The baronet rapidly reflected that silence could avail him nothing, as the notes would doubtless be traced, and he would have to say how he had disposed of them. Hesitation looked suspicious, so he frankly confessed that he had given them to his cousin that same afternoon for the purpose of paying a bill, and added, he supposed they must have been stolen from her.

"I think, if you will allow me, I had better have a few minutes' conversation with both ladies, and hear what they have to say on the subject. I will see Mrs. L'Estrange first," observed Groves, after a pause.

"Certainly," the baronet responded, and led the way upstairs, passing the policeman in the hall, and indicated the widow's apartment while he left Groves to enter alone. He, however, remained outside in the corridor awaiting the inspector's return, which took place very soon.

"Well?" said the baronet, anxiously. "Have you learnt anything?"

"Not much. Mrs. L'Estrange declares she has not been outside the house all the evening, and says Lady Brooke can prove the fact

and as she produced her pistol—which is precisely similar to the one in my possession—it is clear the weapon we found was not hers."

The anxiety in Sir John's eyes grew deeper, but he made no comment, and, after pointing at Cecile's sitting-room, he went downstairs to the library, where he set moody and thoughtful; and it is a strange fact that neither he or Elliot attempted to converse on the subject of the murder, although, naturally enough, the reflections of both were confined to it.

The minutes passed away slowly, lengthened by degrees into half-an-hour—three-quarters, and yet Groves did not return. Once the baronet fancied he heard the sound of horses' hoofs galloping swiftly down the avenue, but he was too preoccupied to inquire the cause of it; and at last, unable to endure the suspense, he went out into the hall, and was met at the front door by Groves himself, who looked excited, and was just on the point of entering.

"Where have you been?" inquired Jack, in surprise.

"To Mr. Sinclair's," naming a county gentleman who lived near, "in order to obtain a warrant."

"But why apply to him? I am a justice of the peace, and could have signed it equally well."

"Yes," said Groves, slowly, and with a curious expression. "I knew you could do so, but I didn't know whether you would, and I wished to spare you the awkwardness of the decision, Sir John. Doubtless you are in a measure prepared for what I am going to say, seeing that you know all the circumstances that have taken place this evening—I mean, that the warrant I hold in my hand for the apprehension of Léon Dupont's murderer is made out in the name of your cousin—Miss Cecile Conway!"

CHAPTER IX.

DAZED and horrified, the baronet led the way back to the library, begging Groves to wait for a few minutes ere he put the warrant in execution, and this the policeman had no objection to do, seeing that the policeman already stationed outside Cecile's door would see that she did not escape.

When the news was communicated to Elliot he received it in perfect silence, and remained in his former attitude with his face hidden by his hands.

Groves gave them a rapid sketch of what the reader already knows, and which he had learned from Cecile, too proud to deny anything, and it built up the strongest chain of evidence against her.

The hearts of both his hearers sank as they listened.

To Elliot the moment was one of horror unspeakable—Cecile, the girl he loved, engaged in some disgraceful intrigue, to escape from the consequences of which she had steeped her soul in guilt and her hands in blood!

He could not realize the horror of it even yet.

"It will therefore be my painful duty to arrest Miss Conway, and convey her to W—— Gaol at once," said Groves, with downcast eyes, but rising as he spoke.

Elliot started from his seat in uncontrollable agitation, and went towards the door, then he stopped as if struck by a sudden idea.

"Jack," he said, in a low voice, "it seems to me that under present circumstances I ought to tell you in what position I stand towards Cecile—she is my promised wife!"

"How is it I did not hear this before?"

"I kept it secret at her own wish."

"Strange!" muttered the baronet, his brows contracting. "I know of no motive for secrecy, because she must have been aware that such news would have been most welcome to us all. This only deepens the mystery."

And in deepening it also deepened his conviction of her guilt.

Every circumstance pointed to it—her own demeanour, the secrecy she had observed with regard to Dupont, her anxiety to procure the

money, her meetings with him, and, above all, the fact of the pistol being found where it was.

Jack groaned aloud, and Groves, perhaps out of delicacy, retired to an opposite window, so as to be out of earshot.

"Gervase, old fellow," he said, with a queer break in his voice, and laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "our family has made its boast for many centuries of the honour of its men and its women. It will never do so in future; Cecile has stained it with an indelible disgrace."

"Then you believe her—guilty?"—in a low tone.

"I see no alternative—the evidence is dead against her, and her own conduct condemns her. I know how high-spirited she is, and perhaps this man taunted her, until her angry passion became too strong to be controlled, and she fired. That the act was premeditated I do not believe."

"I do not know what to think. I am racked with horrible uncertainty, but I will not give up all hope of her innocence until I have seen her," exclaimed Elliot, desperately. And after obtaining the permission of Groves—who was anxious to be as lenient as was consistent with his duty—the two gentlemen went upstairs to Cecile's dressing-room, where the young girl was lying on a couch, her cheeks as white as fresh-fallen snow.

She dismissed the maid who had been attending her; and then Jack, as gently and tenderly as he could, detailed all the circumstances tending to criminate her, she following his meaning with some difficulty.

"And so they accused me of his murder?" she said at length, slowly, and in a dazed sort of way, as if she repeated the words without fully understanding their meaning. "Well, I have doubtless as much cause as anyone to wish his death, and I am justly punished."

"Cecile!" cried Elliot, throwing himself at her feet, and lifting his miserable, beseeching eyes to hers, "explain this mystery—clear your name of this horrible charge—say you are innocent!"

She stared at him for a moment as if bewildered, and then threw herself on the cushions of the couch, and burst into a storm of hysterical sobs, that lasted for some minutes. The fact was, the girl was in a state of highly-strung nervousness, and only a touch had been required to snap the slender thread of self-restraint that held her emotion.

Jack, who was really very much attached to Cecile, could not trust himself to remain after this outbreak, which he looked upon as tantamount to an admission of guilt, and hastily quitted the room, leaving Cecile and her lover alone. As soon as he had gone Cecile seized Elliot's hands in both her own.

"Do you accuse me of murder?" she exclaimed, in a low, intense voice.

"Facts are terribly against you," he answered, and her quick intelligence saw the evasion of the question. She flung his hands from her, and rose to her feet, her form drawn to its fullest height, and her dark eyes flashing.

"You do accuse me—you do believe me capable of this crime!" she exclaimed, her breast heaving, and her fingers lacing themselves tightly together as she spoke.

"Deny it! explain the mystery that envelops your conduct. Say why it was you met Dupont, and gave him money, and then I will answer you differently," he said.

Her face changed, and her hands fell helplessly down at her sides.

"Ah! my deceit has come home to me!" she muttered, almost below her breath, and at that moment there came a knock at the door, and Groves entered.

"Have you explained to the young lady, sir?" he asked hesitatingly, standing on the threshold and glancing uneasily at the girl, whose white, young face touched him with a keen sense of pity.

"What is it?" she cried, looking from one to the other with wild appeal, and but dimly understanding that something dreadful was

about happening to her. "What—" addressing Groves—"do you want with me?"

"I am sorry to say, Miss Conway, I must arrest you in the Queen's name for the murder of Léon Dupont."

She put her hands to her eyes, and a shudder ran through her limbs. There was a moment's silence, complete, intense—the ticking of the clock, the laboured breathing of the girl, were the only sounds that broke the stillness; then she raised her head, and faced Groves.

"Take me!" she said, simply, holding out her hands.

"Cecile—Cecile! answer the question I asked you?" cried Elliot, starting up in agony.

She shook her head and waved him away, but her face was from him, so he could not see that it was the trembling of her lips that kept her from speaking.

"At least let me come with you to W—," he entreated, but again she shook her head—this time very decidedly. And then, with a firm step, she passed out before the inspector, and so on to the carriage waiting outside the door; and when Groves asked if she would not like Sir John to accompany her as far as W— she replied with a decided negative.

And as she drove away, the last night she saw was the face of Mrs. L'Estrange at her bedroom window.

For some time Elliot remained where Cecile had left him, silently brooding; then the door was opened, and Sir John came in, as yet ignorant of his cousin's departure. When he heard it, he bitterly regretted he had not driven to W— with her, but as it was now too late to follow, he and Elliot began to consider what steps they had better take on her behalf.

"Did she say she was innocent?" called Jack. Elliot shook his head despondently.

"No. I could not get her to answer one way or the other; but, however that may be, we must lose no time in engaging a clever detective to pull her through. And, by-the-bye, I know the very man—a fellow named Muir, to whom I once rendered a service, and who I am sure would exert himself to the utmost if I told him what an interest I had in the case. He is not practising much now. I think he did something rather shady himself a few years ago, and, although he was not struck off the rolls, his reputation suffered a good deal; so since then he has partially adopted the profession of a detective, and started a private inquiry office. If I telegraph to him to-night, he'll be down here by the first train to-morrow morning."

This he accordingly did, and then followed the long hours of the night, slowly dragging their weary length, during which neither Elliot or Jack went to bed, but sat up together, the thoughts of both intent on the same object—Cecile, a prisoner in her lonely cell.

They had had to break the news to Lady Brooke, and her grief and shame can hardly be described. She was almost stunned by the blow, and the reflection of how heavily it would fall on her proudly sensitive brother, who had always been so fond and proud of his only child, and whose humiliation would indeed be deep when he learned her crime.

CHAPTER X.

THE next morning the lawyer arrived—a slim, clean-shaven, inscrutable-looking man, with nothing remarkable about his appearance, which was indeed that of a gentleman.

Elliot met him at the station, and as they were driving to the Court gave him a full account of everything that had transpired, not even concealing his own relations with Cecile.

"The case looks very black against Miss Conway," Muir observed, as he concluded. "You see, in affairs of this sort we always look for a motive, and the young lady certainly had one for wishing Dupont out of the way."

"Then you think —?"

"He was her lover!" put in the lawyer, as Elliot paused. "Yes, or rather I should say, had been. But my impression is that, before

proceeding any farther, I had better have an interview with Miss Conway, and learn the exact footing on which she stood with Dupont, and then I shall know better what to be at. Can you drive me to W— at once? I shall have no difficulty in getting an order for seeing her."

"Certainly," Elliot replied, and turned the horse's head in the direction of the city, which they reached in about half-an-hour.

Arrived there, they drove direct to the goal, and Elliot remained outside, while Muir was conducted to Cecile—Cecile, sitting on a low chair, her cheeks haggard, her eyes dark and weary with pain, her whole attitude expressive of the most miserable apathy and despair.

Muir explained who he was, but the fact of his presence had very little effect on her, and it was only when the lawyer, seeing that in her present apathetic condition stringent measures were necessary, gave a vivid description of the peril of her position, and the end to which it would probably lead, as well as the grief and shame of her father and relatives, that she was roused to any degree of interest.

"Do you think — they will hang me?" she said, her eyes dilating as she put the question.

"I think it very probable unless you do something on your own behalf," he replied, and the result showed the wisdom of this answer, for the girl's indifference vanished beneath the influence of this new terror. Heretofore she had thought less of her own position than of her lover's, who her wounded pride would not allow her to recall; but now she fully realized the situation she occupied, and it was terrible enough to make her seize the help he was ready to extend.

"First of all, tell me the details of your acquaintance with Dupont," said Muir, and a burning blush suffused the girl's face as she proceeded to comply.

"It began during the time I was at school at Bruxelles," she commenced, in a low voice, her head bent; "and while I was there he used to come twice a week to give me singing lessons. He was, I believe, by birth, a Frenchman, but had travelled so much in England and America that he spoke English perfectly, and without the least accent to betray his nationality. He was a handsome, insidious man, perfectly at home in all the arts of gaining a girl's admiration—and I, only a silly, frivolous child of sixteen or seventeen. Besides this, I had been so strictly brought up by my father—whose discipline was equalled by that of my school life—that all my instincts rebelled against the severity of the rules, and I was all the more ready to break them."

"I do not wish to excuse my conduct, but still, under the circumstances, I don't think it was unnatural that I should feel flattered at the attentions of my singing master, who used to contrive to slip notes in my hand, and even to meet me sometimes in the garden, for a few minutes, under cover of the dusk. He repeatedly told me he loved me, and, at length, I grew to imagine I returned his feeling. Looking back, I see the mistake I made, and the causes to which it was due—a little to his handsome face, a little to love of excitement, and a great deal to my own romantic temperament. Well, he induced me to elope with him, and I went to his lodgings, whence he was to take me to the registrar to be married, but we were tracked immediately by Madame Lafarre, the principal of the school, who arrived only a few moments after I did, and unmasked him."

"When I saw him in his true colours my fancied love disappeared, and I begged Madame Lafarre to take me away, and, of course, she was most anxious to do so, both for my sake and the sake of her own school. She was a clever woman, and had not come unprepared to fight against Dupont—she told him she held in her possession a cheque of hers to which he had forged her name, and said most positively, that unless he let me go, and gave his word not to breathe a syllable of what had happened,

she would call in a *gendarme*, and give him in custody at once.

"He saw she was in earnest, and his rage at finding himself thus baffled was terrible, but he had no alternative but compliance with her terms; and so Madame Lafarre took me back, and no one ever knew the true story of my absence."

"In my agitation I had neglected asking him for my letters, which were of the usual sentimental kind, and made mention of the various arrangements for my flight; and, as he left the city that same night I had no chance of getting them. I kept the secret of my folly from my father, who I knew would never have forgiven it, and I had no fear of Dupont's revealing it while Madame Lafarre held the forged cheque as a means of silencing him. Unfortunately, she died a few months ago, and so when I met him I was forced, out of regard for my own good name, to make what terms I could with him."

With the rest of Cecile's narrative—her meetings with Dupont—the reader is already acquainted. She gave Muir a full account of them, and he listened very attentively to the recital, now and then taking notes in his pocket-book as some detail of importance was suggested; and, directly she finished, he rose and took leave, promising to lose no time in communicating with her if anything fresh should occur.

"Well; what is your opinion?" eagerly asked Elliot as Muir came out, and they drove back towards the Court.

The lawyer smiled.

"It is rather early to ask me," he answered, "nevertheless I will tell you this much—I do not believe Miss Conway guilty."

"You do not? Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the officer, his face growing radiant. "Did she say she was not?"

"No. I did not put the question to her, but I can form a pretty accurate judgment from people's manner, as a rule."

As they passed through the lodge-gates Elliot pointed out the plantation on the left, and Muir took the opportunity of getting down and examining the spot where the murder was committed, and the exact whereabouts of which the officer was, of course, able to indicate.

The lawyer's quick eye, roving searchingly about, suddenly brightened, and he bent down and detached something from a bramble growing close against the hollow tree before alluded to.

It was only a tiny scrap of black lace that a thorn had caught and held, but he put it very carefully away in his pocket-book, and seemed satisfied with the result of his investigation. He was very anxious to acquaint himself thoroughly with the geography of the plantation, and put many questions to Elliot concerning it.

"There are two ways to the house from where we stand at this moment," he said. "One through the avenue, and another through the plantation itself."

"Yes. The latter is the shorter of the two."

"And Miss Conway says when she left Dupont she went through the avenue, and stayed for a few minutes hidden behind a tree to see when he passed the lodge-gates," mused the lawyer, "and that while there she heard the shot fired. Now, as she returned to the Court with her cousin and yourself by the longer route the person who fired the shot would have been able to get back to the house before you reached it, supposing he or she took the shorter one?"

"Assuredly; and could enter by a side-door almost opposite the shrubbery."

"I asked Miss Conway why she did not take that way," pursued Muir, "and she said she was afraid of Mrs. L'Estrange, or her maid seeing her from the window of the former's dressing-room. May I ask, Captain Elliot, if this Mrs. L'Estrange, whom you mentioned this morning in connection with the pistols—has any cause of enmity against Miss Conway?"

"The two ladies do not like each other," replied the officer, his face flushing; and perhaps

Muir guessed from the reply the reason of their antipathy. However, he said nothing, and they walked on up to the Court, where the lawyer was introduced to Jack.

"By-the-by," observed Muir, to the baronet; "you saw the contents of Dupont's pockets when Groves took possession of them. Can you describe them?"

Jack did so—a pocket-book containing the notes, one or two bills, a little loose coin, and a cigarette case.

"And that was all?"

"Yes."

"There was not a bundle of letters in a lady's handwriting, you are sure?"

"I am quite sure there was not."

The lawyer remained pondering for some time—Cecile had not got the letters, what then had become of them?

"Kindly give me a list of your household," he said, presently.

Jack complied, and when he had finished Muir had the servants in one by one, and questioned them with regard to their movements the night before, receiving in every case a satisfactory answer. Then, in accordance with Jack's desire, Lady Brooke came, looking very worn and harassed, and told how she had gone in the drawing-room the preceding evening and fallen asleep, Mrs. L'Estrange being occupied with a book.

"And Mrs. L'Estrange was therefore with your ladyship the whole of the evening?" said Muir.

"Well, I can't say positively, for I half fancied that she came in the room just before I awoke, and that the click of the door-latch disturbed me. However she said she had not moved, and I see no reason why she should tell an untruth."

Muir went to the door, to open it for Lady Brooke, and as he did so, he caught sight of Susan Fielding, who was crossing the hall. A curious expression came on his face and he beckoned to Jack.

"Who is that woman?" he said, and as Jack told him, added, "It strikes me I have seen her before, only I can't just recollect where. Will you be good enough to send her to me, Sir John, and I will go to the room where the body is lying—some woman who would perjure themselves elsewhere tell the truth in the presence of death."

The baronet hastened to obey, and brought Susan, who looked rather pale, but with no other signs of discomposure visible in her demeanour, and folded her arms as she stood on the threshold of the chamber.

Muir, as if oblivious of her presence, gently raised the sheet covering the murdered man, and exposed his face to view. Then a change came over the woman—her complexion became ghastly, and her limbs trembled so that she had to catch at the back of a chair for support.

"Him!" she muttered, taking a step backward, while her eyes filled with a stony horror.

It was only for a moment, however, that this discomposure lasted; as she felt, rather than saw, Muir's eyes fixed upon her, she made a desperate effort at self-control.

"You evidently were acquainted with this gentleman," said Muir, quietly.

"No!"—shaking her head—"but the sight of him was so unexpected that it upset me."

"Would you mind telling me what you were doing last night?" he asked, his sharp gaze still on her face.

"I never left my mistress's sitting-room, where I was working at some sewing," she answered, with perfect readiness.

"And your mistress—did she go out?"

"Not that I am aware of. I believe she was in the drawing room all the evening."

"Thank you," said the lawyer; then in a low, cool tone, he added, "I think we have met before."

She looked at him, but did not speak.

"Very likely you do not recognize me, but if I mistake not I had the honour of prosecuting you some years ago on a charge of receiving stolen goods, but it was believed at the time

you were only acting as the tool of another female, who had sharply evaded the law. Be that as it may, you were sentenced to five years' penal servitude."

Every drop of blood left her cheeks, and she recoiled a few steps, but without uttering a word in reply.

"You were let out on a ticket-of-leave," continued Muir, quietly, "and have neglected to report yourself at a police-station, for which omission you have rendered yourself liable to be sent back to serve the rest of your time. Now, it strikes me, you know something about this murdered man, and, if you confess it, I shall take no notice of having seen you here, but, if not, I shall telegraph to Scotland Yard, and inform them of your whereabouts."

"I know nothing," said Susan, doggedly, not wasting her breath on a denial that she foresaw would be useless.

"Perhaps a little reflection may enable you to remember, so you had better remain here until I see you again," said Muir, with a glance at Sir John, the meaning of which the latter instantly comprehended as an injunction not to let the woman out of his sight. And then Muir went upstairs to Mrs. L'Estrange's apartments, and found the widow sitting over the fire, wrapped in a dressing-gown, and bearing in her face signs of languor and want of sleep. She started as she saw who her visitor was, but motioned him to a seat, and poured some scent on her handkerchief, which she pressed to her brow.

"I have a headache," she said, as if in excuse for this action. "This dreadful calamity has altogether vanquished my nerves—at the best of times not very strong."

The lawyer's eyes roved over the apartments, which was in a state of disorder that indicated symptoms of flight on the part of its occupiers; and through the open door that communicated with the dressing-room he caught glimpses of several open trunks and portmanteaus.

"I came to speak to you concerning your servant, madam," he observed, watching her keenly from beneath his lowered lids. "Would you kindly tell me in what manner you came to engage her?"

The widow's face crimsoned, and she raised her head with a certain haughty challenge.

"Certainly not! What right have you to pry into my private affairs?"

"I acknowledge it is not my business," he replied, meekly, "but I wished to warn you against her as a convicted criminal."

"You are mistaken!" said the widow, her face, however, turning pale. "I am perfectly satisfied with my maid, and if it is of her you wanted to speak, you may consider our interview at an end."

The lawyer bowed. He had already gained two points—firstly, that Mrs. L'Estrange was quite aware of the true character of her maid, and was indeed probably the person who had been implicated in Susan Fielding's trial, but who the law could not touch; and, secondly, that she was cognizant of his own identity, and therefore on her guard.

"You are about leaving the Court, I see," he remarked, glancing round.

"Yes, I am going to-day," she answered, with a slight shudder; "I cannot bear this place any longer."

"But perhaps you may be required to give evidence."

"I have none to give."

"Might I trouble you to show me your pistol, which is fellow to the one with which the murder was committed?" asked Muir, after a pause; and while the widow went into the other room to fetch it, the lawyer caught up a black lace mantilla lying on the couch and crushed it into his pocket, then bent down and examined the fireplace, about which charred bits of paper were lying.

His sharp eyes scanned them closely, and one scrap of a letter, brown and tattered, that fluttered at that moment from between the bars, he picked up, and kept; for, in spite of the damage it had sustained by the heat, the

characters traced on it were still decipherable, and these were two words: "Yours, Cecile."

He had hardly returned to his former attitude when the widow came back, bringing with her the pistol, of which Muir took possession, and then left the room.

"There is something queer about this handsome Mrs. L'Estrange," he muttered, as he went downstairs—"something not altogether fair, and above board. And I believe she had the missing packet of letters! Now to see if she was in the plantation, too!"

Seeing no one about, he went to the window recess, and shook out the folds of the lace mantilla, in the corner of which was a tiny hole; the edges frayed as if they had been torn. From his pocket-book he then produced the scrap of lace he had found on the thorn. It was of the same pattern and texture, and fitted exactly.

"One step, at all events," he said, coming from the recess, and as he came, he noticed a young girl, apparently one of the housemaids, standing some little distance away, and nervously playing with her apron, while her eyes glanced apprehensively towards the lawyer.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" he said, kindly, and if encouraged by his tone, the girl came forward.

"Yes, sir, if you please," she answered, and paused as if uncertain how to begin.

"Go on," he said, encouragingly.

"Well, sir, it's this. Last night I met my sweetheart out in the garden at the back of the shrubbery, and when I was going in at the servants' entrance I saw the housekeeper, and so I slipped round, and dodged her by coming through the little side-door leading out by the shrubbery, because I felt sure there was no one about to see me."

"On the marble table I saw the little pistol Miss Cecile had been practising with in the morning, and it seemed such a pretty thing that I took it up and looked at it, and then somehow, as I was putting it back, it fell from my hand, and the silver got dented. I was dreadfully afraid it should be noticed, although the dent was only a little one, and I was doing my best to straighten it when I heard a foot-step, and so I put it down, and hid behind the door, and then Mrs. L'Estrange came in. She seemed ill, for just as she reached the table she gave a sort of stagger, and caught hold of it with one hand. It was only for a few seconds she stood so, for she lifted her head almost directly, and then her eyes fell on the pistol; and she snatched it up and ran upstairs, and I felt surprised, because I had seen Miss Cecile lay the pistol down there, and I thought it was hers. Less than five minutes later Mrs. L'Estrange came downstairs again, very quietly, and went into the drawing-room."

As the girl finished, Muir drew a long breath, and asked her name, which she gave as "Jane Firth."

"You were quite right to tell me this," he said, "and now hold your tongue until the proper time comes for you to speak."

The housemaid very readily acquiesced, and having nothing further to relate, went back to the servants' hall, considerably relieved in mind at having thus disburthened herself, while the lawyer remained pondering.

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. L'Estrange was very indignant when she found her maid was not allowed to come to her; she rang the bell, and sent down an imperious message to Sir John, which the baronet answered in person, courteously assuring her that it was not in his power to release Susan, who had rendered herself amenable to the law. Mrs. L'Estrange had a respect for the law, and therefore submitted, but it was with a very bad grace, and her amiability was not increased when she discovered a man placed outside, and evidently watching her own door.

"Is it possible they suspect me?" she mut-

tered to herself, staring gloomily into the red glow of the fire—a very different looking woman from the bright-eyed, rose-lipped creature of a day or two ago. "Still, it does not matter, for they can prove nothing, and it is only Elliot's scorn I care for."

For a little while the thought of him banished all other ideas, and she sat shuddering a few silent, miserable tears, that owed their origin as much to passion as to her own position.

The weather had suddenly changed, and the wind went sobbing and moaning round the house, while rain-drops rattled dismally at the windows.

By degrees the fire burned low down in the grate, and the widow made no effort to replenish it, although she shivered as if with cold, and drew her furred mantle closer round her.

By-and-by the door opened, and for the second time Muir came in, holding a bundle of papers in his hand.

He made no apology for his entrance, but took up a position opposite Mrs. L'Estrange, and selecting a photograph from among his letters, held it before her.

"Do you recognize it?" he said, and the answer was written on her white face, from which every vestige of colour fled.

The likeness was one of a beautiful girl in her first youth, and beneath it was written,—"Caroline Lonston, 186—."

"Time has dealt leniently with you, Mrs. L'Estrange," observed the lawyer, with a slight sugar, "for though this was taken ten years ago, there is not the slightest difficulty in recognizing the original. I suppose at that period you were unmarried—it was not till afterwards you united your fate to that of Léon Dupont."

She spoke never a word, only her eyes fastened themselves on his with a sort of fascination.

"Yes!" added Muir, consulting another document, "this certificate of marriage between Caroline Lonston and Léon Dupont is dated two years later, and from these letters and a diary—all of which I have discovered in a box at his lodgings in W—, I find that after twelve months of matrimony you and your husband could not agree, and so decided to separate, entering at the same time into an arrangement that you would both consider the marriage, to all intents and purposes, null and void, and that you should resume your maiden name, and either of you should be at liberty to contract another matrimonial engagement—a very convenient plan, Mrs. L'Estrange, but one the law has, unfortunately, set its veto against. You no doubt acted in perfect good faith, and it is a pity your husband did not destroy your letters, and so give you a fair chance to start with. Have you and Mr. Dupont met since then—till last night, I mean?"

She put her hand to her bosom, and her breath came thick and fast, but still she did not answer.

"I suppose you carried out your plan, and resumed your profession as a public singer, until Mr. L'Estrange, an imbecile old man, fell in love with you and married you, and when he died, you, as his widow, took possession of a good share of his large fortune. Large fortunes are not to be met with every day; and, naturally enough, you set store by yours, and did not wish to lose it, as you would have done if it became known you had a first husband living, and so, when brought face to face with that first husband, you resolved he should die!"

There was an awful pause, during which she kept her eyes fixed on his face. The rattling of the rain on the window-pane, the sighing of the wind, the occasional fall of a cinder, were the only signs to break the stillness. Then Mrs. L'Estrange spoke.

"Has Susan Fielding betrayed me?"

"No. Let me finish what I have to say."

He then detailed in even passionless tones what the girl had said.

As he ceased speaking she lifted her head, and gazed at him with the wild appeal of a hunted animal brought to bay—his ingenious theory of her guilt, built up on the circumstances that had come to his knowledge, had enabled him to speak with a certain, calm conviction that left no doubt on the mind of the widow as to his being in a position to prove all he had said, and she accepted it as a fact that further resistance would be useless—the game was played out, and she had lost!

"You have vanquished me!" she said, with a bitter smile, "but as you are strong be merciful and grant me one favour—fetch Captain Elliot to me."

Muir hesitated, but finally complied with her request, as he knew there was no danger of her attempting to escape during his absence.

No sooner had he gone than the widow ran into the next room, and taking from her dressing-case a tiny phial, drank its contents, and returned to the boudoir just as Elliot came in.

"You desired to see me?" he said, his tones icily constrained.

"Yes, I want to tell you I am not so bad as circumstances would make me out—I am no premeditated murderess."

Finding he did not speak, she came a few steps nearer, and continued,—

"When I went to the plantation last night it was for the purpose of finding out what secret existed between Cecile Conway and the man she went to meet—of whose identity I had not the faintest idea, for I imagined Dupont to be in Australia. When Cecile left him I came out from my concealment intending to offer him money for her letters, and then I saw who he was, and thought of all his presence meant to me—loss of wealth, fame, and perhaps a charge of bigamy. He knew me at once, and seeing the diamonds I was wearing—unfortunately a very valuable set—guessed I must be rich, and instantly said he should claim me as his wife. I reminded him of the bargain we had made to live apart, but he declared he would no longer abide by it, and insisted on my return, and then, hardly knowing what I did, I pulled the trigger—and he fell. I had brought out the pistol intending, if anyone saw me, to say I purposed practising with it, and directly I had fired it I threw it in the tree, and ran as fast as I could to the house."

She hesitated a moment, and put her hand to her side, as if it pained her; then went on with an effort,—

"Susan knew nothing of what I had done and had no idea who the murdered man really was, as she had not seen his face, and I forbade her to do so, knowing she would recognize it, for she was perfectly aware of my past history, and had seen Dupont once or twice—Susan has been a good friend to me—the only one I ever had—and has never failed me in an hour of need—"

She was beginning to falter, and speak a little incoherently, and suddenly stopped. Then she came to Elliot and threw herself at his feet, seizing his hand, and covering it with kisses.

"That is all. But it was love of you that made me reckless—such love as no woman in the world will ever bear you again. I may say it now, standing, as I do, on the brink of the grave, and with the privileges of the dying."

Even as she spoke, lifting her miserable, passionate eyes to his averted ones, a change came over her face, and she fell heavily forward on the ground. Elliot lifted her in his arms, and called loudly for help; but help, when it came, was useless—the poison had already done its deadly work, and remedies were vain. A little while later she expired, with a faint smile on her wan features, for even the pangs of death could not kill the joy of feeling herself, for a few brief moments, held in the arms of the man she had loved with a passion that had wrought so much evil.

That same day Elliot, Sir John and Lady Brooke, all drove over to W—, but to the first fell the task of communicating to Cecile

the joyful news of her innocence being proved, and, after he had done this, he besought her forgiveness for ever having doubted it. Cecile's love could not withstand his pleading, cruelly as her pride had been wounded, and so they came out together, happy in their restored faith, and trusting to the future to blot out the misery of the past.

Susan Fielding's liberty was not interfered with by Muir, and as soon as Mrs. L'Estrange's funeral had taken place, she left the Court, never betraying one word of her late mistress's confidence, and carrying away with her the secret of the link that bound her to the poor erring woman, whose sin had worked its own retribution.

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

In what respect do time and a kicking horse resemble one another?—In the fact that it is better to be *ahead* of both time and a kicking horse than *behind* either of them.

A young man in a train was making fun of a lady's hat to an elderly gentleman in the seat with him. "Yes," said his seat-mate, "that's my wife, and I told her if she wore that bonnet some fool would make fun of it."

Lord Castlereagh made so many new words that Canning called him the literary coiner. "He has got a mist in his mind," said he. "Mist in his mind!" rejoined Sheridan, "Would he had sage in his head!"

CONSOLATION.—"There is something consoling for every ill in this life," said a firesome old moraliser.—"Is there?" asked a friend. "What consolation have I for my bald head?"—"Why," exclaimed the moralist, "the consolation is plain enough. Your wife can't pull your hair."

THOSE TERRIBLE CHILDREN.—V., who is very ugly, said to his godson, Lonnie, the other day: "You must not cry, my boy; it will make you look ugly later on." "Then, godfather," replied the youth, "you must have cried a great deal when you were a boy!"

TEACHER AND PUPIL.—Teacher: "Why how stupid you are, to be sure! Can't multiply eighty-eight by twenty-five? I'll wager that Charles can do it in less than no time." Pupil: "I shouldn't be surprised. They say that fools multiply very rapidly now-a-days."

A LITTLE girl, accompanying her mother on a visit to an old lady, the latter showed the child her parrot, in a cage by the window, warning her at the same time not to go too near, lest he should bite her. "Why should he bite me?" she asked. "Because, my dear, he doesn't know you." "Then please tell him that I am Mary Anna."

It is not often that one comes across such a crushing retort as that which a Yorkshire husband received from his wife, the other day, through the medium of the public press. He advertised in one of the local journals that he would no longer be answerable for the debts incurred by his wife, who seems to have been a truly amiable creature, if one may judge from the advertisement, which she published next day, in reply: "This is to notify that I am able to pay all my own debts, now that I have got rid of Tommy."

A GENTLEMAN going along the street with a bottle of liquor, which he had purchased for medicinal purposes, slipped and fell. He did not put out his hand to save himself, but held the bottle out of harm's way and stood the brunt of the fall. His friends, on learning of the event, asked him why he did not let the bottle go and save himself. Said he: "If it had fallen and broken, the folks who picked me up would have smelled the whisky, and you can judge what they would have thought. I could stand the blow on my head better than on my reputation." Some men think quickly.

SOCIETY.

Her Majesty has intimated her desire to be godmother to the son and heir of the Marquis and Marchioness of Conyngham, the infant Earl of Mountcharles, whose christening will take place as soon as Lady Conyngham's health is re-established.

The Shah of Persia has sent Princess Bismarck the highest decoration of Persia, which no woman before has ever possessed. The German Emperor has given his approbation, which was necessary before the Princess could accept the high distinction offered to her. The "Star of the Sun" will cover one-half of a ball-dress bodice.

At Balmoral great festivities have been announced in honour of the silver wedding of the Crown Prince and Princess of Germany. It was while on a visit there to the Queen and Prince Consort that the engagement took place between the Crown Prince and our Princess Royal in 1857, the wedding being celebrated on the 25th of the following January.

The Princess Christian performed at the Mortimer village concert selections from Schumann's "Kinderszenen," and a mazurka by Movinsky, which was enthusiastically encored. Her Royal Highness also joined Miss Liddell in two duets, "Three Spanish dances" and "Pizzicati," by Delibes, which was also encored and graciously acceded to.

A Loan Collection of Irish lace will be exhibited at the Mansion House in June, when Her Majesty has signified her intention of being its patron. The Princess of Wales has graciously offered to lend some fine specimens of Irish lace, while the Duchess of Connaught, the Duchess of Albany, and Princess Mary have also added their names as patrons of the exhibition.

LAWN-TENNIS was one of the Prince of Wales's favourite amusements while staying at Cannes, Captain Vyner having the honour of entertaining his Royal Highness. While staying there his Royal Highness's dog, "Tehow," which accompanied him thither, died, much to his regret, and was buried in the garden of the Grand Hotel du Pavillon, a suitable memento being placed over his grave. The little animal was brought from China by the young prince and given to his Royal Highness, but unfortunately "Tehow" was of a breed which could not live out of his native country, and instead of being better at Cannes it grew worse and worse, feeling the cold intensely until it died.

After returning from the continent the Prince visited the Savage Club in the Savoy on Wednesday, February 21. The prominent feature in the programme was a lecture on the recent war in Egypt, delivered by Mr. Melton Prior (special correspondent of the *Illustrated London News*), and illustrated by magic lantern reproductions of that gentleman's sketches. The lecture over, the Prince of Wales was presented with a handsome album containing cabinet portraits and autographs of all the members of the club. The frontispiece of this album is very quaintly illuminated with a variety of savage symbols. In the speech in which H.R.H. thanked the club for its most appropriate offering, he took occasion to suggest that the Savage Club should shortly give an entertainment in aid of the Royal College of Music, the proceeds to go to found a "Savage Club" scholarship. The resolution embodying this suggestion was carried by acclamation. After this the Prince went upstairs to supper, accompanied by forty selected members. Then—the big room downstairs having been cleared—a smoking concert, of the kind which always follows the weekly house dinner, was given, in which Mr. Lionel Brough, Mr. George Grossmith, Mr. Pinero, Mr. Charles Townley, Mr. Brennan, Mr. Terry, Mr. Harry Paulton, Mr. John Maclean, Mr. Maybrick, and many others took part.

STATISTICS.

THERE are in Great Britain more than 19,000 hounds maintained entirely for hunting purposes.

PRODUCTION OF GOLD AND SILVER.—From the report of the Director of the United States Mint we learn that the production of precious metals throughout the world during 1881 somewhat exceeded that of the previous year. The production of gold in 1881 was of the value of 107,773,157 dols. and of silver 97,659,460 dols., whereas in 1880 the figures stood at 106,436,786 dols. for gold and 94,551,060 dols. for silver. By far the largest producer was America—viz., gold, 34,700,000 dols.; silver, 48,000,000 dols.; followed in descending scale by Australia—gold, 31,127,515 dols.; silver, only 227,125 dols. Russia—gold, 28,551,028 dols.; silver, 473,519 dols. Mexico—gold, only 989,160 dols.; silver, 25,167,763 dols. Columbia—gold, 4,600,000 dols.; silver, 1,000,000 dols. Germany—gold, 232,610 dols.; silver, 5,576,699 dols. Austria-Hungary—gold, 1,240,806 dols.; silver, 1,303,280 dols. Venezuela—gold, 2,274,692 dols.; no silver. Africa—gold, 1,993,800 dols. Canada—gold, 1,094,926 dols.; silver, 68,295 dols. Bolivia—gold, 72,345 dols.; silver, 11,000,000 dols. Chili—gold, 128,869 dols.; silver, 5,081,747 dols. Spain—silver, 3,096,220 dols. The remaining supplies were furnished by Sweden, Norway, Italy, Turkey, the Argentine, Brazil, and Japan.

GEMS.

THE weak sinews become strong by their conflict with difficulties.

HE shall be immortal who liveth till he be stoned by one without fault.

TO love is to admire with the heart; to admire is to love with the mind.

FAME comes only when deserved, and then it is as inevitable as destiny.

PHYSICAL exercise and intellectual rest in due season should never be neglected.

UNFRIENDLY indeed is he who has no friend bold enough to point out his faults.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

EXTRACT OF SEVILLE ORANGE PEEL.—Pare a dozen oranges very thinly, put the shred peel into a quart bottle, fill it up with brandy or unsweetened gin, shake occasionally during a month, then drain off the liquor into small bottles.

ECONOMICAL STEW.—Slice some cold beef or mutton, season the meat with pepper and salt, and dredge over it a little flour. Put it in a stewpan, with some of the cold gravy, or, if there be none left, add a little water. Slice an onion fine, and add to it also a few potatoes. Stew gently until the meat is quite tender. If there was no cold gravy, a little butter rolled in flour must be added a few minutes before the stew is served.

ORANGE WINE.—Pare eighty Seville oranges as thinly as possible, pour one gallon of boiling water on the peel, and let it remain forty-eight hours. Pare off the white part from the oranges, and throw it away. Squeeze out all the juice, and add it to the peel; wash the remains and the pips of the oranges after squeezing, in order to have all the goodness out of them. Put all the liquid with the peel and juice, with 30lb. of good loaf sugar, and sufficient cold water to make the whole quantity, ten gallons, into a brandy or rum cask. Stir up thoroughly every day for a week, then put a coat well dipped into brewer's yeast into the bung-hole. If fermentation does not begin within three days put another spoonful of yeast. A hissing sound denotes the commencement of fermentation; in a fortnight after this put the bung in the cask, and let the wine remain for twelve months before bottling.

MISCELLANEOUS.

JUMBO is not yet forgotten by his youthful British admirers, for cakes, sweets, and various dainties are constantly being sent to him by children in England. Certainly his new home thoroughly suits Jumbo's constitution, as he has grown seven inches since his arrival in the States.

THE subscription raised by private friends of the late Lord Cavendish in order to perpetuate his memory in some manner which should be agreeable to the unfortunate nobleman's relatives has reached such satisfactory proportions that it has been closed. The memorial will take the form of a recumbent statue, which will be erected in the Priory Church at Cartmel, Lancashire, where Lord Cavendish was brought up, and where he resided during the first few years of his married life.

A CURIOUS beauty contest was recently held in Chicago as an advertisement for a certain American actress who was coming out in that town. On the Sunday before her appearance, the *San Francisco News Letter* tells us, stands were erected at the corners of the principal streets to vote on the knotty question as to the superiority of English, American, or African beauty. Mrs. Langtry, Miss Palmer, the actress, and her black maid being put as the candidates. The public entered into the joke, and some 48,000 deposited voting tickets in the different boxes, of course giving Miss Palmer a handsome majority, and causing such confusion that the police were powerless. Finally the actress's agents were arrested for obstructing the pavements and for disorderly conduct.

A RARE skeleton has been found at Pompeii in a garden on the south side of the buried city near the forum, on which is the Trajic Theatre. The garden, the Naples correspondent of the *American Register* tells us, still shows the furrows left by the gardener, and the little hillocks in which the seeds were planted over 1,800 years ago. This unfortunate skeleton had apparently looked up his treasures, and was fleeing towards the Stabian Gate as the nearest by which he could reach the open country, but was smitten down still clinging to his keys. The wave of mud rolled over him, his hand relaxed, and after 1,800 years he is found with his hand unclasped, and the keys a few inches from his prostrate body. Round his waist was the sash which all Romans wore with their flowing robes, and which they girded up when entering into active work.

COOKING A FINE ART.—It cannot be denied that good cooking is an important element in home life and happiness. Many people think that while a girl must go to school for years to accomplish a knowledge of her own and foreign languages, and must have masters for this and that accomplishment, she may be safely left to pick up an acquaintance with cooking after she has a household of her own. This is a great mistake. I myself, says a lady, once had a dreadful time in trying to prepare a dinner, in the absence of my cook, and I would have given up Latin and French that day to have known when the potatoes were done, and to have discovered how to get the peas and beans out of the water in which they were floating. To be a good cook, girls, one needs a light, firm hand, an accurate eye, and a patient temper. One needs, too, a few rules and a trustworthy recipe-book. We have all seen the easy way in which a good cook makes a cake. She tosses three or four things together, gives a flirt of the spice-box, and a feathery touch or two of her foamy eggs, pops the pan into the oven, and presto! there appears the perfect loaf. And if you ask her how she did this or the other part of her work, she will very likely smile and say, "Oh, I used my judgment." The judgment is the quality which no novice in cooking can expect to possess; but with patience and constant practice it will surely come.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MAURA.—The name Gladys is Welsh, a modification of Claudia, the feminine of Claudius, meaning "shut." Freda means "peace." Hermione "an interpreter."

H. W. L.—A child born of English parents in Paris, while they were travelling, is not considered as belonging to any other country than that of his parents.

COLLEEN.—Any music seller in your neighbourhood can procure for you the words and music of the song you seem so eager to obtain.

GWENDOLEN.—The hair tied with blue is light brown, those tied with red and white, dark brown, and that tied with green, hazel brown. All are fine in texture and evidently well cared for.

C. B.—For pimples, take of the best lard, one ounce; citron oil, one and a half ounces; almond oil, half an ounce. Mix all well together, scent with oil of bergamot, and apply every night before retiring.

ALICIA J.—1. July 8, 1864, came on a Friday; November 22, 1865, on a Thursday. 2. Alexander II., Czar of Russia, was assassinated March 15, 1881. His eldest son succeeded to the empire, under the title of Alexander III.

FRED.—The property belongs to you and your sister, and when you are twenty-one years of age you can take legal possession of it. You will have to get the advice and assistance of a good lawyer.

S. P.—The mania for collecting postage stamps having pretty much died out, it is not likely that your friend could sell his for more than a trifle. If his personal friends should buy them among themselves, and give him something worth while for them, perhaps that would be the best way to help him.

D. S.—You had better go to work and earn sufficient to start in business again in the city where your wife is living with her father. You will only get into trouble by forming other ties. Your wife should leave her father and live with you. You have a legal remedy.

ELLA.—You may perhaps be able to sell the old edition of the Bible in your possession to some dealer in old books, bric-a-brac, &c. We are not authorised to give the address of any such establishment, but you can doubtless ascertain its whereabouts by inquiring among your friends.

M. J. F.—Ask the chemist to get you the desired quantity of sulphide of barium. The term *sulphuret* is synonymous with sulphide, but of late years has been superseded by the latter. This article is not much used, and can only be obtained from wholesale druggists.

BERT.—The young man certainly does not deserve to be received, except as an ordinary acquaintance, but it is unnecessary to have a scene, or to tell him what you think of him. *Slide*, used as you use the word, is "slangy" and very inelegant.

SAM.—If your friend went with you for the purpose of calling, it was the duty of the hostess to say that they would be glad to see her again. If, however, your friend merely accompanied you, as a matter of convenience, because you happened to be together, the whole affair would end with the call, and neither party would be expected to invite the other to continue the acquaintance.

B. L. J. R.—It seems as though a shrewd lawyer ought to be able to find out facts concerning the young lady's relations to you and others during your period of poverty to show that the engagement was actually broken off. It would be very strange if she did not talk about it to some of her acquaintances.

J. F.—You are rather young to contemplate marriage, and it would be advisable to wait two or three years longer, by which time you will have gained more knowledge of the world, and be better fitted to assume the responsibilities of married life. If the young man loves you, he will doubtless be willing to wait for the period mentioned.

A. M.—A dealer in old books informs us that the German work in your possession is worth from two to three pounds, provided it is in a state of good preservation. Dealers in antique articles require that all they may see fit to purchase are in good order before paying the highest price; therefore, if a book should be mutilated in any manner, the amount of the purchase-money will be gauged thereby.

SOREY.—The disease with which you are afflicted is undoubtedly of a scrofulous nature, and we would not venture to give you any prescription, that being entirely out of our province. If the physician of whom you speak is a first-class practitioner, he should be able to prescribe some remedy for your relief, in the shape of a blood-purifier or something of that kind. We have failed to find any reference to a disease known as "bran scrofula."

CURIOS.—In all ages of modern times, travellers in the region of the Dead Sea have had some pillar pointed out to them by the Arab guides as the remains of Lot's wife. Hundreds of descriptions of such pillars have been published. Some of the members of the party that made the Ordnance survey of Sinai and the Desert of the Exodus, an expedition that was sent out from London in 1868, hunted up such a pillar, under the guidance of natives who gave them the Arabic legend connected with it. They describe it as "a tall, isolated needle of rock, which does really bear a curious resemblance to an Arab woman with a child upon her shoulders."

W. P.—If you will wait patiently, we think that you will be likely to meet the young gentleman and become acquainted with him by an introduction in the usual and proper way. Your parents can assist the young man by inviting him to call, if they approve of him. The young man himself should manifest a little enterprise. This is very important to success in love as in business.

S. L. M.—To pickle lemons, first pare off the yellow rind very thin, cut them across the end about one inch, and pack them in a vessel with dry salt; let them remain in the salt for a week; then take them out and dry them in the sun, or before a fire; spread them on dishes, until the salt candies on them. Put them in jars, and pour hot vinegar over them, with spice to suit taste. They are better if kept four or five months without being used.

DAISY.—As you still trust your lover you should write again, telling him, in a few words, how often you have written. Put on the outside of the letter: "If gone away from ———, please forward; and if not then found, return to ———," giving your own name and address. It looks very much as if your lover had grown cool to you. If he had as much love for you as your affection for him deserves he would have written to you, whether he got your letters or not.

MAGGIE.—A lotion composed of a mixture of 2 drachms of sal-ammoniac, 1 ounce of cologne water, and 1 pint of soft water is recommended as efficacious for the removal of freckles. Apply night and morning. There are other remedies for these facial disfigurements, which, on account of the deadly poisons used in their manufacture, we do not feel at liberty to give to the general reader, as no one not thoroughly acquainted with the use of these deadly drugs should attempt to use them in any shape.

THE TOLLING BELL.

The tolling bell! The tolling bell!
Oh, hear its sad, sad music swell.
So sad and sweet
Through village street,
Where happy children play,
It oft has rung
For those as young,
As happy, too, as they.

The tolling bell! The tolling bell!
The sad sweet notes their story tell
Of years that passed,
But could not last;
Of youth and middle life;
Of silvered hair;
Of forms bent with care,
So weary with earth's strife.

The tolling bell! The tolling bell!
So oft repeats—'tis well—'tis well!
Yes, well with those
In sweet repose;
And well with those who wait,
With patient hope,
That soon they'll ope
And pass the pearly gate.

Triumphant ring, then, tolling bell!
For those who—like the asphodel—
Bloomed for a day;
Then passed away,
To claim the sure reward
That waits in Heaven
For those whose lives given
Their life and love to God.

P. C.

B. L. T.—We know of no substance that will produce a luxuriant growth of hair on any portion of the body. If nature has not provided you with a beard, it will be impossible to grow one by artificial means, notwithstanding the fact that numerous advertised nostrums claim this extraordinary power. Constant shaving may improve the slight growth of your beard—that is to say, the use of the razor every morning, which, however, will tend to make the hair very coarse.

C. F.—We should not advise a young man, without means and leisure, to begin the study of law, as a classical education, an academic training in the principles of legal science, and one or two years' service in the office of a practising lawyer, are, in our opinion, prime elements for success in that overcrowded profession. The calling of a lawyer demands the best intellectual discipline, and to hold his own, one must be able to make all departments of knowledge tributary to himself.

LAURA J.—The following directions, if closely followed, will enable you to wash and finish the point lace as thoroughly as an experienced laundress:—Mix a teaspoonful of powdered borax in a basin of strong, white castile soap-suds. Baste the lace you intend to wash very carefully with fine cotton, upon two thicknesses of flannel. Thus arranged, soak it in the soap-suds mixture for twenty-four hours, or longer if very dirty, changing the suds two or three times. Then let it lie in clean water for two or three hours, changing the water once. This is done for the purpose of rinsing it. Squeeze it out (do not wring), and, when partially dry, place the flannel, with the lace on it, lace downwards, on two thicknesses of dry flannel laid on a table, and smooth it with a hot iron. During the whole process the lace must remain basted on the flannel, and when it is pressed must lie sandwiched between the dry and damp flannels, and pressed upon the latter. When the fabric becomes perfectly dry rip it off.

X. O.—1. Eating between meals is considered by many standard authorities as conducive to evil results, as it tends to break up that regularity of the various functions of the human body so necessary to good health. In the majority of instances, persons much given to this irregular manner of living suffer from dyspepsia and other troubles arising from a disordered state of the digestive organs. 2. Nuts or sweetmeats are not considered as healthy articles of food to be eaten by persons suffering from the troubles just enumerated; but with healthy individuals, if indulged in with moderation, they produce no disagreeable results. 3. Fat meats of any description, pies, cakes, and any article prepared with the addition of lard or butter, are considered as fatty foods.

DICK.—Macaulay's "History of England" interests every one who reads it carefully, but you must not expect to read and understand it without any conscious effort, as you do a good serial story. Strickland's "Queens of England" and Motley's "History of the Rise of the Dutch Republic" are as fascinating as any novel to one who has the necessary intellectual training. There are hundreds of books descriptive of travels round the world, and unfortunately those who travel round the world usually go so rapidly that they see not a part of the world well. A selection of essays from the *Spectator* of the last century is worth reading, as well on account of their good sense and the light they throw on manners in the eighteenth century, as for the pure English in which they are written.

JESSIE R.—The young man to whom you are engaged is certainly not acting as he should, and if he does not explain his conduct, and change it, your wisest course will be to break the engagement. This is of course a very sad necessity, but it is better to find out before marriage, rather than after it, that the young man is unworthy of your love. In your present state of mind you would be both wrong and foolish in marrying the other man. Although it is better that a young woman should marry, there are far worse misfortunes than remaining single. Mental derangement is a real objection to marriage, not so much on account of a danger or unhappiness to be feared from the person deranged, who may be entirely cured, but because insanity is often hereditary, and apt to appear in the next generation.

MAY.—In order to be properly prepared for the stage, you will have to undergo a regular course of instruction at a school of elocution or at the hands of a professor. This will prove expensive, and unless you have a remarkable talent, you will then have to take a subordinate position, and by close application and arduous study work your way upward. As to the probabilities of your being successful, there is about one chance in a thousand. The fact that you have a "liking for the stage," and that you have taken a creditable part in amateur entertainments, proves nothing, as the latter are not open to criticism, the audience being composed of the friends of the performers, and naturally their prejudice in favour of the people on the stage blinds their eyes to any imperfections in the acting.

ESTHER.—Evangeline, the heroine and title of a verified tale in two parts by Longfellow, was the daughter of Benedict Bellefleur, the richest farmer of Acadia (now Nova Scotia). At the age of seventeen she was legally betrothed by the notary public to Gabriel, son of Basil, the blacksmith; but the next day the colony was exiled by the order of George II., and their houses, cattle and land confiscated. Gabriel and Evangeline were parted, and the troubles of her life now commenced. She wandered from place to place in search of her betrothed, who had settled in Louisiana; but when Evangeline reached the place, Gabriel had just departed. She then went to the prairies; to Michigan, and so on, but in every instance she failed in her search. At length, growing old in this hopeless search, she went to Philadelphia and became a Sister of Mercy. The plague broke out in the city, and when she visited the almshouse she saw an old man, smitten down with the pestilence. He proved to be her lost lover. He tried to whisper her name, but death sealed his lips for ever. The shock was more than she could bear, and shortly after his death she was laid with him in the same grave, the lovers being at last united in death.

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